

KUO KEEPS THE FAITH ■ TALIBAN 2.0 ■ HOW TO LOSE AN ARMY

DECEMBER 18, 2006

The American Conservative

Out With the New

OLD GUARD RETURNS

MICHAEL C. DESCH

NEOCONS ROUTED?

SCOTT MCCONNELL

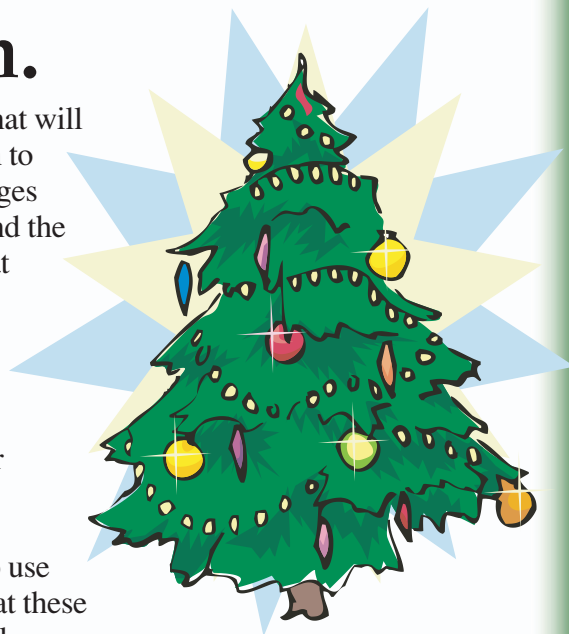


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[WAR]

SEND MORE TARGETS

How tragic it would be if voter repudiation of President Bush's Iraq policy led not to a change of course but to an escalation of the war. But packing more troops into Iraq is suddenly the buzz around Washington—John McCain practically demanded it in a Capitol Hill confrontation with Gen. John Abizaid.

The general rightfully retorted that the Army's ability to sustain a commitment of 20,000 more troops is "not something we have right now." But the question needs to be asked: on what grounds does anyone think that 20,000 or 50,000 more troops (*The Weekly Standard's* most recent prescription) would lead to victory—even if they could be procured without further lowering of military standards, sending reservists back for additional tours, and hollowing out forces elsewhere? Pre-war planners doubted that 400,000 troops would suffice.

The Iraqis want us to leave: by large margins, they tell pollsters coalition forces cause more violence than they prevent. And pulling troops out a division at a time would give the Iraqi government an incentive to get its act together.

President Bush's visit to Hanoi reminds us how the escalation siren tempted a previous American generation. But it didn't lead to victory then, and it won't now.

[BELTWAY]

AMNESTY'S AMIGO

It's official: establishment Republicans view their party's rout as an invitation to capitulate on immigration. That's the message sent by selecting Sen. Mel Martinez as chairman of the Republican National Committee. The Floridian lectured his colleagues that their enforcement-first position amounts to "harshness only" and seems to believe that the 2006 results were a bipartisan mandate to obliterate what's left of the borders.



"HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO REMEMBER HOW WE GOT HERE?... JUST HELP ME GET RID OF THESE BOTTLES BEFORE DAD SEES WHAT I DID TO HIS CAR!"

PAT BAGLEY MSNBC.COM

"I think we have to understand that the election did speak to one issue," Martinez opined, explaining he was for "presenting a hopeful face" and against "bashing people." By "hopeful face," Martinez means amnesty. He co-sponsored the disastrous Senate immigration bill, which would have amnestied at least 85 percent of illegal aliens already in the United States while inviting in a record number of new guest workers. Most Republicans in both houses voted no.

And the chairman-to-be's new RNC colleagues don't like it much better. One committeeman told the *Washington Times*, "Clearly, Martinez is going to lead the fight for amnesty that Bush couldn't win when Republicans controlled the Congress," while another likened his appointment to the president's nomination of Harriet Miers. If Republicans want to prioritize an immigration policy rejected by swing voters and their base alike, they should get used to being in the minority.

[BUDGET]

MISREADING THE MIDTERMS

In announcing his candidacy for House minority leader, Indiana Congressman Mike Pence wrote to his colleagues, "[W]e did not just lose our Majority—we lost our way. We are in the wilderness because we walked away from the limited government principles that minted the Republican Congress."

As the GOP surveyed its ruined majority, this sentiment began to sweep the caucus. On the Senate side, John McCain picked up the refrain: "We increased the size of government in the false hope that we could bribe the public into keeping us in office. And the people punished us. We lost our principles and our majority."

Perhaps they believe that. We would appreciate a moratorium on bridges to nowhere, and few can resist the appeal of a chastened prodigal. But contrition comes easy now: the Republican minority can claim success simply by voting against Democratic legislation—which they're inclined to do anyway—without producing actual spending cuts.

More important is what this fiscal scapegoat spares. Some voters may have been dismayed by the GOP's wastrel ways. Many more were disgusted by their war (no thrifty enterprise either). Refusing to acknowledge that this election was a referendum on the Iraq fiasco reveals the depth of their detachment and forecloses vital debate. But the electorate knows the difference between spilled blood and red ink, voted accordingly, and will do so again if Republicans remain on the warpath.

[RELIGION]

LOSING FAITH

As pundits picked apart the midterm election results, two competing theories developed about the state of social

conservatism. Some political analysts contend that the Religious Right is moribund because voters handed them defeats on several state ballot initiatives and rebuffed congressional Republicans. Yet commentators perennially seize on social-conservative setbacks to proclaim that Falwell is dead—only to see the Christian Right come roaring back in the next election cycle.

Other election watchers claim that 2006 proves the Democrats are ready to pick the Republicans' lock on white evangelicals, with exit polls showing an 8-point Democratic swing among these voters. But that still leaves 70 percent of white evangelicals in the GOP column.

David Kuo, whose book Doug Bandow reviews in this issue of *TAC*, proposes a third alternative—many Christian conservatives may take a break from politics. Kuo argued in the *New York Times*, "Evangelicals are beginning to see the effect of their political involvement on those with whom they hope to share Jesus' eternal message: non-evangelicals." If GOP politicking conflicts with attempts to spread the Gospel, some supporters of the Christian Right may "becom[e] more truly conservative in their recognition of the negative spiritual consequences of political obsession and of the limitations of government power."

Such an outcome wouldn't be ideal for the Republican turnout machine, but it might be good for evangelicals.

[DIVERSITY]

ARIZONA DREAMIN'

Political scientists will be mining the midterm exit-poll data for years, and certain questions—"Will the GOP maintain its hold over the evangelical vote?"—have become perennials of contemporary American politics. At least people know there is no easy answer to that one. The other question—"What about the Hispanic vote?"—is one that

the journalistic establishment thinks it already has the answer to. Repeat in unison: "Republicans are losing Hispanics (the most important minority in American politics) because of their immigration-restrictionist stance."

Fine, except that what everyone supposedly knows isn't true. On illegal immigration, Hispanic voters are pretty much divided, as they have always been. In Arizona, now ground zero for immigration politics, 48 percent of Latinos approved an initiative making English the official language. Two years ago, 47 percent supported a ballot measure denying welfare benefits to illegal aliens.

Exit polls showed no evidence of increased Hispanic turnout in Texas and California. Polls in California also gave no indication that immigration was a priority for Hispanic voters. The overall GOP share of the Hispanic vote did shrink from an estimated 40 percent to 30 percent but not much more than the GOP share of the much larger white vote, which dropped from 58 percent to 51 percent. Hispanics, a Democrat-leaning group, were not "swing voters" but instead went with a general anti-Republican flow.

Moreover, Hispanics remain a very small share of the national electorate—about 6 percent. If one wanted to point to a big trend in recent elections, it would be the continuing defection of Reagan Democrats from the GOP column—something that can be explained by many factors.

The lesson for politicians as they contemplate the immigration issue: do what you believe best for the country and your constituents. Many Hispanics will applaud you. The ones who don't now may well in an election cycle or two. Don't be intimidated by the mythical power of the Hispanic vote. It's not that large, it's diverse in many ways, and it's hardly a monolithic constituency for amnesty. ■

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No Mandate for Amnesty

Some recriminations and finger-pointing are to be expected in the aftermath of the Republican loss of both the House and Senate, but some partisans are

trying to distort the election data to fit their own agenda. Vocal advocates of amnesty for illegal aliens are working overtime to find evidence that voters punished “border hawks” on Nov. 7.

The illegal-immigration issue did not help Republicans much in the congressional elections, but neither did it hurt them. The reason has more to do with Democratic strategy than voter preferences. The issue of border security was so universally popular by midsummer that the Democrats decided they needed to neutralize it—and they did.

In the race most often cited as evidence of immigration control being a losing issue for Republicans, in Arizona’s 8th district Democrat Gabrielle Giffords ran radio and television ads urging strong measures to control illegal immigration. That Arizona voters are not souring on the illegal-alien issue was demonstrated by the passage of several ballot initiatives on the subject. Rep. J.D. Hayworth lost his race mainly because of his association with lobbyist Jack Abramoff, not because he crusaded for secure borders.

In Colorado, Democrats in the state legislature successfully neutralized the issue in July by passing a law to block access to welfare by illegal aliens and then claimed to have “the toughest laws against illegal immigration in the nation.” Thus the issue did not figure prominently in state legislative races.

In many races, Democratic challengers claimed to be strong supporters of secure borders. But for the most part they avoided the issue so voters would focus on Iraq and “the culture of corruption.”

What about the loss of six Senate seats? Are we supposed to believe that Senators Chafee, Burns and DeWine—all of whom voted for the Senate’s amnesty bill—somehow lost their seats because other Republicans were border hawks?

In both the House and the Senate, Republican incumbents not identified with immigration control lost seats in equal or greater proportion to conservatives known for being strident border-security advocates. Only a zealot for open borders—or a Washington insider like Fred Barnes anxious to salvage some aspect of Bush’s legacy—can see these results as a repudiation of immigration law enforcement.

Still the open-borders lobby wants lawmakers to believe that Republican losses were the result of taking too strident a position on borders and immigration law enforcement. This is political entertainment, not election analysis.

Political commentators are entitled to indulge their personal or corporate biases, but should we call it political science? The open-borders enthusiasts at the *Wall Street Journal* have not yet noticed that only seven of the 93 Republican members of the pro-immigration enforcement Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus who sought re-election lost their races, which is a better batting average than the House Republicans as a whole. How can that be spun into a repudiation of the enforcement-first strategy?

It is also a little strange to hear Democrats now argue that voters rejected Bush’s Iraq policy, his tax policy, his energy policy, and his trade

policy but mysteriously did not reject his immigration policy. It is far more likely that Bush’s immigration proposals are part of the reason for his low approval numbers, especially among independent voters. Yet the proponents of those unpopular measures now want Republicans to join the Democrats in a push for amnesty. No one should be surprised that the amnesty lobby is playing this card, but that is no reason for others to join their game. Is this a smart way for Republicans to reclaim their principles and revitalize their base?

If the Pelosi Democrats want to ram through an amnesty plan as part of their “new direction,” they may have the Democratic votes to do it. If a lame-duck president wants to lend his support to that gigantic blunder, he can do that. But why should Republicans in Congress join in that effort when 75 percent of Republican members oppose amnesty and want secure borders in place before other reforms are considered?

The 2006 election neither repudiated nor validated the populist movement for immigration law enforcement because Democrats successfully neutralized that issue. We should consider immigration proposals in terms of what is good for the country. Amnesty is not “immigration reform” and will only compound our problems, not fix them.

Republicans need to learn from Bush’s mistakes, not repeat them, and his amnesty proposal was one of his biggest blunders. If Republicans misread the election results as a green light for repeating the disaster of the 1986 amnesty legislation, they will have a bigger problem than the Iraq quagmire. ■

Tom Tancredo chairs the Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus.

Message in a Ballot

On his first foreign trip after the “thumpin’,” President Bush headed for Hanoi. Prior to departure, his lame-duck Republican Congress gave him a reminder of the

election—a swift boot, setting aside his trade treaty with Vietnam.

It is a harbinger of things to come, and Bush senses it.

At the National University of Singapore, a chastened president took to resurrecting the familiar bogeymen of all Bush Republicans: “We hear voices calling for us to retreat from the world and close our doors. ... These are the old temptations of isolationism and protectionism, and America must reject them.”

But unlike his father, Bush is not coming off a triumph like Desert Storm. He is a repudiated president, with an army mired in a chaotic mess in Iraq. And the trade deficits, industrial ruin, and job losses his free-trade policy has produced have just helped lose him both houses of Congress.

With the ascendancy of James Baker and Robert Gates, pundits are declaring victory for the “realists” of Bush 41 over the Vulcans and neocons of Bush 43. And surely they are partly right.

Scooter is preparing his defense. Feith, Wolfowitz, and Perle are gone. The rest of the crew will not survive a Pentagon purge by Gates, who will strip the intel portfolio from the cherry-pickers and stove-pipers and hand it back to Langley.

So are we witnessing a revival of Baker-Scowcroft realism? Was that what America voted for? Not hardly. For the “realists” are NAFTA-GATT free traders, while free trade took a “thumpin’” as bad as Bush. Moreover, the world in which George W. leads America today is a far different place from the unipolar world of 41, where

America was sheriff, assembling and leading international posses to ride down the outlaws of the world.

Multipolarism is back. Europe rejects U.S. leadership. Russians, reverting to autocracy, are putting Russia first. China has become a great power rival in Asia and Africa. With the Iraq and Lebanon wars, America has never been more isolated in the Middle East. Bush would not dare visit the region as Nixon did. Iran and North Korea are defying us and the UN openly. Anti-Americanism is rampant in the hemisphere, and neo-Marxist populism has triumphed in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Bolivia and was only narrowly defeated in Mexico and Peru.

The post-Cold War world of 41, where America led the world into an internationalist era of free trade and collective security is gone. Today’s world more resembles the world of 1914 than 1989.

As for all the railing against “isolationism and protectionism,” that is an attack on a straw man. No one ran on such a platform. But America did vote to repudiate the trade and war policies of George W. Bush, as was evident in the rejection of the Hanoi trade deal and the near-universal clamor for a new policy to get us out of Iraq.

No nation can sustain a war that has lost the support of its people, Burke said. Nor can any nation sustain a foreign policy that has lost the support of its people.

Harry Truman had to bring the boys home from Europe in 1946 because that is what the people demanded. Harry sent them back in 1949 and 1950

because that is what the people, awakened to the evil character and hostile intent of Stalin, also wanted.

But if the people are the true “deciders,” what were they saying Nov. 7? They were saying: we want our borders secured, this war ended soon, and a new trade policy that will stop the export of U.S. industrial jobs and begin to create them here in the United States. They want our leaders to start looking out for America, and Americans, first.

They are not demanding that we “retreat from the world and close our doors.” But they are in a nationalistic frame of mind. As for the neocon “idealism,” where U.S. soldiers go abroad in search of monsters to destroy—monsters selected by AEI—they are not interested. Nor are they interested in exercising some “benevolent global hegemony” over all mankind.

If our Lords Temporal are contemplating new military adventures for Wilsonian ideals, they are courting revolution. America wants to bring the troops home, defend the United States, and let other nations fight their own wars and pay their own bills.

Iraq is the Dienbienphu of neoconservatism. But the repudiation of neoconservatism is not a mandate for Bush 41 internationalism. That was yesterday. And if the politicians did not get that message, they will be sent it again in 2008, and in every election thereafter, ‘til they get it right.

On Nov. 7, America said let us be rid of all these ideologies: of liberalism, neoconservatism, globalism, whatever. We want our vital national interests defended and the needs of our own nation addressed.

As for crusades for democracy, goodbye to all that. ■

Operation Rescue

In bringing back Robert Gates, Bush recalls the wisdom of his elders.

By Michael C. Desch

COLLEGE STATION, home to Texas A&M University, is a pleasant place—at least for nine months of the year. Though George H.W. Bush's presidential library is here, after that it's hard to be farther out of the Beltway loop. In most people's eyes, this is the political wilderness, yet an out of the way town in East Central Texas just became Robert M. Gates's stepping stone to George W. Bush's cabinet.

This image of the presumptive defense secretary languishing in the wilderness can be easily overdrawn. Bob and his wife Becky have a beautiful place on Orcas Island at the confluence of the Straits of Georgia and Juan de Fuca to which they escape the summer climes of the Lone Star State. Bob also serves on various corporate boards—he was recently named chair of Fidelity's—that regularly meet in more cosmopolitan environs. And even here in the Brazos Valley he never completely escaped the Beltway's gravitational pull. Along with former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, Bob co-chaired a Council on Foreign Relations study group on Iran in 2004 and was until recently a member of former Secretary of State James Baker and Congressman Lee Hamilton's Iraq Study Group.

Now he returns to Washington for what may be the most difficult assignment of his career: salvaging the wreckage of one war and averting another—while the president who once boasted of his political capital surveys a lost majority. But both experience and temperament outfit Gates well. Unlike the neoconservatives who populated Rumsfeld's Pentagon, he

is a pragmatist, who won't soon indulge their utopian schemes. And unlike his predecessor, Gates's time in government, and more recently here at Texas A&M, reveals a thoughtful consensus-builder prone to take a dim view of unilateralism.

Gates came to College Station in 1999 at the behest of former President Bush to serve as interim dean of the newly established George Bush School of Government and Public Service. At the time, the Bush School was a small program in the College of Liberal Arts. But current Katrina relief czar Don Powell, then the chair of the Board of Regents, felt that it needed to be a stand-alone college, and Gov. George W. Bush and the Texas legislature provided financial wherewithal.

The divorce from the College of Liberal Arts was difficult—some of the estranged parties still do not speak—but Gates successfully guided the Bush School from program to college. "Bob's great contribution," someone close to the process told me, "was taking something that could be very prickly with the faculty and making it into a seamless and smooth transition." Once a permanent dean was selected in the fall of 2001, Bob literally rode off into the sunset toward the Pacific Northwest, seemingly shaking the dust of College Station from his Bass Weejuns.

But scarcely a year later, when Texas A&M President Ray Bowen announced his intention to step down, Powell and other notables encouraged Gates to throw his hat into the ring. At first Bob was reluctant, but after 9/11 and one last call from Powell in December 2001, he

told me that he felt he "needed to do one more public service and couldn't think of anyplace [he] would rather do it than A&M." With the backing of George Bush Foundation chair Brent Scowcroft, he squared off against Phil Gramm for the position. Gramm, a former Texas A&M economics professor and U.S. congressman and senator, had substantial support among the regents. But by a very close vote Gates prevailed and became TAMU's 22nd president. He quickly got past the Gramm fight and won over many skeptics who did not think that a former CIA director could be an effective university president or that a non-Aggie could lead A&M.

Three early moves highlighted Gates's bureaucratic skill and political acumen. He acted quickly to clean up the legal mess resulting from a 1999 campus accident. (A longstanding tradition of building huge homecoming bonfires resulted in the collapse of a 110-foot-high pile of tree trunks that killed 12 students.) Next, he fired R.C. Slocum, the legendary but failing football coach. In a deeply tradition-bound place like A&M, both of these moves were fraught with peril, particularly for an outsider.

Bob's most ambitious effort, however, was his plan to bring in almost 450 new faculty by the fall of 2007. In his first year, the state legislature threatened deep funding cuts. Legislatures often play a game of chicken with public higher education, warning of drastic cuts and then, to the relief of faculty and administrators, implementing much smaller ones. Though something of a

neophyte in this game, Bob played it to his advantage. He ordered the various colleges to prepare for the full cut and when it turned out to be much smaller, he gave the extra money back to the colleges on the condition that it be used to fund an unprecedented 25-percent increase in the size of the faculty over the next three years. This dramatically changed the face and the standing of the university in a very short time.

After just three years in office, Bob had earned not only the respect but also the affection of the Aggies. He managed to do this by simultaneously embracing and revamping Aggie culture, reinventing a place not known as a bastion of intellectual excellence into a top-flight university. A close observer explained, he “brought lots of talents that people never envisioned he had.”

Concern quickly shifted from whether an outsider like Gates would fit with the peculiar and hallowed traditions of Texas A&M to how long we could keep him in Aggieland, as it was becoming clear that the Bush administration was courting him. We thought we dodged the bullet in January 2005 when Gates turned down President Bush’s offer to become Director of National Intelligence. His voice cracking with emotion, Bob recounted his agonizing decision to stay at the university in a speech to the faculty in the fall of 2005: “Washington, D.C. is my past; Texas A&M is my present and my future...” The Aggies breathed a collective sigh of relief. Had we been more attentive, we might have noted a caveat at the end of the speech: “at least for a while.”

The Bush administration continued to pursue Bob. In early 2006, State Department Counselor Phil Zelikow made repeated inquiries. At one point, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called from Air Force One to ask him to become deputy secretary of state. Not surprisingly, Gates turned down this

offer from his former NSC aide to serve as her deputy. But clearly the bidding was going up. A cabinet appointment was obviously next.

Once it became clear Rumsfeld had to go, we should not have been surprised that Bush offered Gates the Pentagon’s helm—or that he accepted. As he explained in the announcement of his departure: “While I chose Texas A&M over returning to government almost two years ago, much has happened both here and around the world since then. I love Texas A&M deeply, but I love our country more and, like the many Aggies in uniform, I am obligated to do my duty. And so I must go.”

Speculation abounds about where Gates will take the Pentagon. Will he be a cat’s paw for Scowcroft and Baker (and perhaps the former President Bush) or will he revert to the hardline cold warrior of the Reagan-Casey era? No one knows for sure; Gates always plays his cards close to his chest. During the first Bush administration, a colleague remembered him as “very self-controlled” and as someone who “doesn’t share anything.” Gates had much the same *modus operandi* here at Texas A&M.

My only direct windows into his thinking about policy were two seminars he participated in here at the Bush School. In the fall of 2004, Bob spoke about the recommendations of his study group with Brzezinski. In jest I introduced him as being to the left of the Bush administration on the issue of engagement with Iran. He bristled, in part I suspect because he does not think of himself as being to the left of anybody and in part because he regarded it as mere common sense to approach a foreign-policy problem like Iran using both sticks and carrots.

This fall Bob addressed the Bush School again, this time about the Iraq Study Group on which he served until his nomination to be secretary of defense. In keeping with both his natural

inclinations and the ISG’s ground rules, he talked little about their recommendations. His remarks focused instead on the group’s recent trip to Iraq and the challenges of operating on a bipartisan panel. He confirmed later, however, that the ISG reached out broadly in the course of their deliberations: “The list of those we have talked with is extraordinary, including the Syrian ambassador in Washington. We wanted all along to talk to the Iranian ambassador to the UN and the Syrian foreign minister. We did need to get approval to speak with the Iranian, and it was given, but strictly in the context of asking his views on the situation in Iraq.”

Another place to look for clues to Gates’s agenda is in the views of the former President Bush’s network of foreign-policy advisers of which he is a prominent member. George H.W. Bush does not criticize his son publicly, but this reticence is not shared by other members of his circle. Scowcroft was outspoken in the fall of 2002 concerning his reservations about the invasion of Iraq, a stance that cost him the chairmanship of the president’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. Gates himself implicitly criticized the administration’s unwillingness to speak directly with Iran in the widely discussed 2004 CFR task-force report. Most recently, Bush family confidant James Baker has been hinting that the Iraq Study Group will broaden the call for dialogue with Iran to include Syria, a significant change from the administration’s current course.

This implicit criticism is not surprising as many of the former president’s advisers were obviously disappointed with the neoconservative approach from the very beginning. Philosophically, the new administration’s inclination to remake the world using American power went against the whole notion of the first Bush administration’s “new world order,” which was all about

inclusion rather than exclusion of other great powers. Practically, the members of the former president's foreign-policy team thought their decision not to oust Saddam in 1991 was correct, and they saw the policy toward Iraq in 2002 and 2003 as an effort to "completely junk that approach," in the words of one insider. Moreover, they had serious doubts about this administration's competence in policy execution. From the outset, the 41 crowd felt, in his words, increasingly left "out in the cold." It was not so much that their specific advice was ignored. It was never solicited.

So what changes should we expect Gates to bring to the Pentagon? He will certainly push his own agenda, but he will also try to build agreement behind it rather than bulldozing opponents. He is hawkish: he supported the use of force against Iraq to get Saddam to comply with UN disarmament resolutions, and he's on record about the urgency of preventing Iranian nuclearization. But Gates is also a realist. He will likely chart a very different course from the neoconservative strategy of regional transformation through nation-building in Iraq and will be more prudent in his recognition of the limits of American power. Neither is he averse to using diplomacy, whether with Iran and Syria, when such an approach furthers our interests.

In my opinion, he will play from a position of strength: surely the president understands that he needs Gates more than Gates needs this job. But whether he, along with other recalled members of the old guard, can extricate the younger Bush and the rest of the country from the morass in Iraq is uncertain. Still, his return in the twilight of the Bush presidency signals a belated realization that it's time for a change. ■

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[down but not out]

They Only Look Dead

Neoconservatives lobbied for an unnecessary war and are getting blamed. But they have made comebacks before.

By Scott McConnell

REPUBLICANS MAY HAVE gotten "a thumpin'," but the neocons appear to be suffering a full-fledged rout. The intellectual faction that had its origins in City College's storied Alcove No.1 during the 1930s (home of the "anti-Stalinist" socialists) has become a household word, and not in a good way. Apolitical grandmothers write their children e-mails deriding "the neocons and their war." Intellectuals who have logged years on the payroll of well-funded neoconservative institutions forward little ditties through cyberspace: (to the tune of "Thanks for the Memories")

But thanks to the neocons,
For every war a shill,
We're driven from the Hill
But their mission was accomplished
Since our troops are dying still.
A cakewalk it was.

Thanks for the neocons
Those late-night shows on Fox
We watched while drinking shots
Sure Cheney lied and soldiers died
But ain't Ann Coulter hot?
A kegger, it was.

If disrespecting the neoconservatives is emerging as a minor national sport, it should be enjoyed, and tempered, with realism. The last few years have been difficult for the faction, the years to come perhaps more challenging still. But they are as aware of their own vul-

nerabilities as anyone—much more so than the Bush-Rove Republicans with whom they have been allied. Neoconservatives have faced the political wilderness before and survived. They have other political options.

Moreover, whatever one might feel about "the neocons and their war" it is difficult not to experience some twinges of remorse over the movement's decline. For decades, *The Public Interest* was a penetrating and groundbreaking journal. *Commentary* in the 1970s—when it turned hard against the countercultural '60s—was brave and forceful. Nathan Glazer may never have written anything void of wisdom. To see the movement that spawned this grow into something bloated, stupid, and ultimately dangerous to America is to see the terminus of a vital part of our intellectual history.

The neoconservative lines were first broken two years ago when Iraq War architects Douglas Feith and Paul Wolfowitz were ushered out of the Pentagon—a virtual decapitation of the cadre that planned the war. Scooter Libby's indictment and subsequent departure from Dick Cheney's side was a further blow. By last summer, George Will, the dean of establishment conservative journalism in Washington, had turned openly against the group. Noting *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol's call for the U.S. to use the Lebanon war as a pretext

to bomb Iran, Will remarked, “The most magnificently misnamed neoconservatives are the most radical people in this town.” Kristol received more of the same medicine when he appeared on National Public Radio with Gen. William Odom, director of the National Security Agency under Ronald Reagan: “Mr. Kristol certainly wants to make [Lebanon] our war. He’s the man with remarkable moral clarity. He tends to forget the clarity he had on getting us into the mess in Mesopotamia. I think if you look at his record, you’d wonder why anybody would allow him to speak publicly anymore.” Thus moral clarity—that robust quality the neoconservatives had long ascribed to themselves—is returned as mockery.

A main dilemma for the neoconservatives is their relationship to Bush’s lame-duck presidency. Neocon doubts that Bush will stay true to the course they have helped set for him are widespread. Addressing these fears, this summer Norman Podhoretz argued that the president was still their man. Quoting Bush speeches at length, Podhoretz insisted the evidence showed Bush still believed in the “Bush Doctrine.” But it is not clear that neoconservatives will be rallied by such hallucinatory observations as

I must confess to being puzzled by the amazing spread of the idea that the Bush Doctrine has indeed failed the test of Iraq. After all, Iraq has been liberated from one of the worst tyrants in the Middle East; three elections have been held; a decent constitution has been written; a government is in place; and previously unimaginable liberties are being enjoyed.

Veteran pamphleteer Joshua Muravchik recognized the larger problem, that the current neocon brand—now defined by Bush, the Iraq War, and American global hegemony—has

become broadly unpopular. Writing in *Foreign Policy*, Muravchik observed, “some among us, wearying of these attacks, are sidling away from the neocon label.” He raised a bugle to stem the retreat. Neoconservative ideas are “as valid today as when we first began.” George Bush “has embraced so much of what we believe that it would be silly to begrudge his deviations.” Neoconservatives, he mused, should acknowledge mistakes, if necessary—“We were glib about how Iraqis would greet liberation.” And they should concentrate on their greatest strength—“political ideas.” While Muravchik unsurprisingly

powerful people in the White House are the women who are in love with George W. Bush—Condi, Karen, Harriet, and Laura. In the neocons’ heyday, he formulated what Jonah Goldberg admiringly called the “Ledeen Doctrine”: “Every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some small crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business.”

Unlike Norman Podhoretz, these neoconservatives were realistic about what a charnel house Iraq has become, but this was Bush’s fault, not theirs. Richard Perle, who left his chairmanship of Bush’s Defense Policy Board in

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called for renewed agitation to bomb Iran, his most amusing recommendation may have been that neocons should “volunteer” to train U.S. Foreign Service officers in the “war of ideas”—and make sure their trainees were assigned to every overseas post.

Podhoretz (writing this past August) and Muravchik (published in late October) may have been anticipating the remarkable neocon self-immolation that would appear in early November on *Vanity Fair*’s website, in the form of David Rose’s interview notes for a forthcoming article. Rose quotes neoconservatives who had played major roles in the formulation and selling of the Bush administration’s foreign policy all lamenting that Bush has proved himself unworthy of the sound advice they gave him. Eliot Cohen, whose pre-Iraq War book stiffened the Bush team to ignore the reservations of America’s top generals, fears America will need “another big hit” to spur it to the warpath again. Michael Ledeen, a confidant of Vice President Cheney, laments that the most

2004, acknowledged that had he “seen where we are today,” he would not have advocated the invasion of Iraq. But he attributes the current failure to Bush’s bumbling: “[Decisions] did not get made in a timely fashion ... you have to hold the president responsible. ... Huge mistakes were made, and I want to be very clear on this: they were not made by neoconservatives who had almost no voice in what happened ... and certainly no voice in what happened after [Saddam’s] downfall. ... I’m getting damn tired of being described as an architect of the war.”

Perle chose not to dwell on his associate of more than 20 years, Douglas Feith—the man he recommended to Donald Rumsfeld for the number-three slot at the Pentagon, the same Douglas Feith that Rumsfeld entrusted with planning for post-Saddam Iraq.

David Frum’s complaint is more interesting. Frum was a principal author of Bush’s “axis of evil” designation, which placed Iran on Washington’s enemies list, put a damper on Iranian co-operation in

rolling up al-Qaeda, and helped cut the legs from under moderate reformist elements in Iranian politics. Says Frum, "I always believed as a speechwriter that if you could persuade the president to commit himself to certain words, he would feel himself committed to the ideas that underlay those words. And the big shock to me has been that although the president said the words, he just did not absorb the ideas."

But Bush's lack of ideological aptitude was predictable, a bone neocons had chewed over for a long time. As Bush advisers, both Frum and Perle had a difficulty: they felt themselves to be far more intelligent than Bush (as surely they were) and yet needed Bush to sell their global political ideas to the American people. Perle never proved able to mask his condescension. Years before, he had commented, "The first time I met Bush, two things became clear. One, he didn't know very much. The other was that he had the confidence to ask questions that revealed he didn't know very much."

Frum made a real effort to finesse the matter. After leaving his White House speechwriter job, Frum wrote a memoir depicting Bush as "The Right Man"—one who was "nothing short of superb as a wartime leader." Bush, he said, combined moderation, persistence, and boldness in just the right measure. Temperament, it appeared, could trump the ability to "absorb the ideas." Frum's book would set the standard for hagiography of the one-time master of Baghdad. The genre was later supplemented by John Podhoretz's *Bush Country: How Dubya Became a Great President While Driving Liberals Insane* and Fred Barnes's amazingly sycophantic *Rebel-in-Chief*. The neocons may not have believed all they wrote in these courtier volumes, but they certainly believed it should be published. Extricating themselves from the Bush embrace will be awkward and risks

burning the faction's bridges to more conventional Republicans.

But I predict that they will manage it. Despite the obituaries now being written, neoconservatism will not soon be over with and certainly won't disappear in the way that American communism or segregation have. The group has always been resilient and tactically flexible.

Recall the state of neoconservatism in the early 1990s. The neocons could point with pride to their role in the Reagan presidency—though America's Cold War success owes as much to the times when Reagan ignored their advice as when he took it. George H.W. Bush

Muravchik had a long paper trail, and his job search did not survive *Washington Post* columnist Mary McGrory's illumination of it. "Plainly if the president-elect is looking for a human rights director who thinks Mrs. Clinton is a post-Cold War Communist dupe, the search is over," wrote McGrory.

What is basically a group of intellectuals interested in foreign policy has not always found it easy to acquire powerful political sponsors. Sen. Henry "Scoop" Jackson was the archetype, a "labor" Cold War Democrat and the man who originally brought Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz to Capitol Hill. A force in

FOR OLDER NEOCONS, WITH BACKGROUNDS AS DEMOCRATS AND EVEN SOCIALISTS, EMBRACING THE REPUBLICAN PARTY ALWAYS SEEMED A DATE ON THE WILD SIDE.

granted a presidential pardon to Iran-Contra figure Elliott Abrams, allowing him to continue his career. But that was all Bush 41 did for the group. When the elder Bush, after evicting Saddam from Kuwait in 1991, tried to put America's weight behind settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, many neoconservatives suddenly remembered their Democratic Party roots and bolted. In 1992, a significant group of neocons signed on as advisers to Bill Clinton, and the Democratic standard-bearer, eager to shed the McGovernite label neoconservative publicists typically draped around his party, entertained their counsel during the campaign.

But appointing them to strategic foreign-policy posts in his administration was another matter. Soon enough, press coverage of the Clinton transition was filled with neoconservative grumbles of being shut out. In one noteworthy example, Beltway neocons strongly backed Joshua Muravchik's aspiration to be assistant secretary of state for human rights. But like many neoconservatives,

the Senate, Jackson could delay or even thwart policies he opposed, and he (and aide Richard Perle) did a brilliant job of tying Henry Kissinger's détente policy in knots in the mid-1970s. But that was the power to negate, not create. Jackson induced sleep on the stump, as his two presidential bids revealed. Replacing him as the great hope for the neocons was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the New York-born Harvard professor who was, in the 1960s and '70s, a flamboyant and often brilliant intellectual. But once elected to the Senate in 1976, Moynihan proved a disappointment, turning out to be not remotely as hawkish as neoconservatives expected.

For the older neocons, with backgrounds as Democrats and even socialists, embracing the Republican Party always seemed a date on the wild side. But not so for those now under 60, who came of political age under Reagan. Republican ties were natural. And as the experience with the Clinton transition demonstrated, crossing the floor to the Democrats will not be easy.

But if Bush has failed them, what options remain? Joe Lieberman has less national appeal than Henry Jackson did, and once you have been embedded in the Pentagon and the vice president's office, forays from the Senate will seem a weak brew. John McCain is another matter, and if Americans can be persuaded that the solution to their Middle East, terrorism, and other diplomatic dilemmas lies in more troops and invasions, neoconservatism will have springtime all over again.

In the short run at least, neoconservatism is wounded and is likely to present a different public face. The soaring language about how it is America's destiny to spread democracy throughout the globe, the efforts to define an American global empire as something greatly to be desired—this will dropped, a casualty of the Iraq fiasco. But it's not clear that the neocons will miss the democracy baggage. Jeanne Kirkpatrick's famous essay "Dictatorships and Double Standards"—the one that landed her the post of Ronald Reagan's ambassador to the United Nations, was published in *Commentary* and considered a primary example of "neo" conservative thinking of the period. But recall that her argument was that "authoritarian" regimes could be reliable American allies in the Cold War, and Washington was destabilizing them by hectoring about human rights and democracy. Kirkpatrick was wrong in the end about how durable communist "totalitarian" regimes turned out to be (compared to the authoritarian dictatorships she favored), but the dominant perspective of the essay was undeniably realist—an attempt to take the world with its myriad political cultures as it was rather than imposing upon it a pre-fabricated American model.

What won't be dropped is the neoconservatives' attachment to Israel and the tendency to conflate the Jewish state's interests (as defined in right-wing Israeli

terms) with America's. So one can look forward to neoconservative agitation on two fronts: a powerful campaign to draw the United States into a war to eliminate Iran's nuclear potential and an equally loud effort in support of maintaining Israeli dominance over the West Bank and denying the Palestinians meaningful statehood. Those who argue effectively for a more even-handed American policy towards Israel and Palestine will risk the full measure of smears linking them to historical anti-Semitism. The archetypal neoconservative argument will no longer be Bob Kagan and Bill Kristol's call for American "benevolent global hegemony," but Gabriel Schoenfeld's attack on John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt in *Commentary*, an essay that sought to connect the pair's work to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

This election season ends with neoconservatism widely mocked and openly contemptuous of the president who took its counsels. The key policy it has lobbied for since the mid-1990s—the invasion of Iraq—is an almost universally acknowledged disaster. So one can see why the movement's obituaries are being written. But the group was powerful and influential well before its alliance with George W. Bush. In its wake it leaves behind crises—Iraq first among them—that will not be easy to resolve, and neocons will not be shy about criticizing whatever imperfect solutions are found to the mess they have created. Perhaps most importantly, neoconservatism still commands more salaries—able people who can pursue ideological politics as fulltime work in think tanks and periodicals—than any of its rivals. The millionaires who fund AEI and the *New York Sun* will not abandon neoconservatism because Iraq didn't work out. The reports of the movement's demise are thus very much exaggerated. ■

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Pence None the Richer

House conservatives come up short in their bid for reform.

By W. James Antle III

IF CONSERVATIVE ACTIVISTS, bloggers, and pundits were allowed to vote in congressional leadership elections, Congressman Mike Pence would have won the race for House minority leader in a walk. The Indiana Republican's fan club loves him both for who he is—a rare voice for spending restraint on Capitol Hill—and isn't—part of the team that led the GOP to electoral disaster in November.

Pence piled up endorsements from the Family Research Council, Club for Growth, and the head of the American Conservative Union. *The American Spectator's* Philip Klein wrote that Pence's election would be a "bold move that Republicans can make to signal to conservatives that they are ready to change for the better." *Human Events* and the *Washington Examiner* weighed in with their support.

Members of the House Republican Conference apparently didn't get the memo. When the votes were counted, Congressman John Boehner of Ohio—who replaced Tom DeLay as majority leader in the previous Congress—crushed Pence 168 to 27, with one vote for Texas Congressman Joe Barton. Missouri Rep. Roy Blunt was re-elected to the whip slot over Arizona Congressman John Shadegg, a Pence ally, by 137 to 57.

These lopsided margins shocked Pence's backers outside of Congress. "They lost what, 30 seats?" asks Club for Growth executive director David Keating. "I really don't know what it's going to take for these guys to get the message." "House Republicans have decided to reward failure," longtime activist

Richard Viguerie fumed to the *Washington Times*. The popular blogger John Hawkins chided GOP leaders for failing to learn the lessons of 2006. Yet the episode could also teach disenchanted conservatives something about the limits of idealism as a political strategy.

The avuncular, white-haired Pence claims Ronald Reagan as an ideological soulmate, and he shares the 40th president's famously optimistic temperament as well. Speaking to a roomful of conservative journalists a few weeks before the midterms, he confidently predicted that all three of his endangered Indiana colleagues would be re-elected—and held out hope that the GOP would cling to its House majority with a smaller yet more conservative caucus.

We know how two of these predictions turned out—the three at-risk Hoosier Republicans have passed into history, along with their party's congressional majority—but Pence's third call was closer to the mark. While it was a tough year for Republicans across the board, moderates were hit disproportionately hard. The conservative Republican Study Committee (RSC) retained over 100 members, making it a majority of the new minority party. The elections did tug the House GOP slightly to the right.

Thus when Pence decided to run for House minority leader, it wasn't just another burst of optimism. As chairman of the RSC, he started out with a strong potential base of support. Boehner and Blunt were tainted by their association with the discredited old guard, while Pence had been a thorn in the leadership's side. The Indiana congressman

voted against No Child Left Behind—a bill Boehner, as chairman of the House Education Committee, helped craft—and the Medicare prescription-drug benefit. These two lonely stands against Bush-era big government have since become conservative conventional wisdom.

So has Pence's contention that excessive federal spending imperiled the Republican majorities. As earmarks exploded and increases in real discretionary spending eclipsed records set under Lyndon Johnson, Pence pushed for spending cuts. When Congress rushed through an expensive package to aid reconstruction after Hurricane Katrina, the RSC made a high-profile pitch for offsets. Although Operation Offset was mostly a failure, maverick fiscal conservatives did manage to extract modest reductions in entitlement spending—about \$40 billion in five years—from the Republican leadership. "We've lost our way," Pence lamented to GOP audiences.

Pence's conservative halo is not completely untarnished, however. At the height of the immigration stalemate between the House and Senate, pitting enforcement against amnesty, Pence introduced his own plan—or, more accurately, a version of the Kriebel Foundation's guest-worker proposal. Billed as a no-amnesty, free-market solution, it would have effectively made many current illegals eligible for guest-worker status while outsourcing the vetting process to private "Ellis Island centers."

For the first time, critics questioned whether the RSC's most famous member

had conservatives' best interests in mind. While the Pence plan had little chance of passing, some House Republicans feared it would divide the caucus enough to force a compromise with the Senate. "Pence is looking for a place at the table," a pro-enforcement legislator's aide complained to me at the time.

As it turned out, the guest-worker plan had little effect on the immigration debate. Pence retreated on the issue before running for minority leader, satisfying Congressmen Tom Tancredo and Steve King, both leading immigration reformers, enough to win their endorsements. Boehner, after all, had been one of the 17 Republicans to vote against their party's enforcement-only border-security bill. But among some conservatives, Pence's proposal did lasting damage to their perception of the Indiana's strategic judgement.

"Pence got suckered," David Frum charged at *National Review Online*, asking whether "this wounded party" might not need "a skilled if cynical doctor rather more than it needs an ardent but naive faith-healer." Whether they agreed with Frum's characterization, most House Republicans decided to go the skilled doctor route. Yet if Pence has his limitations, he is far from alone.

GOP conservatives are rightly angry that the leadership of their party has been taken over by nonideological technocrats and opportunists. But they don't seem to appreciate the extent to which they share the blame for this development. While Boehner and Blunt may not be very interested in ideas, few of their conservative critics have shown much aptitude for passing legislation and building majorities.

Consider the well intentioned if often futile efforts of the RSC. Many of its legislative proposals and budget blueprints fail to claim majority support even among its own members. The leadership elections were a case in point.

Pence won only a quarter as many votes as the RSC has members while Shadegg claimed a bare majority—and that's assuming they each drew zero votes from non-RSC Republicans.

Another example is an initiative the group called Contract With America: Renewed. Their plan, which would eliminate 150 federal programs to achieve an estimated \$350 billion in savings, was based on the balanced-budget program that passed the House in 1995. It has fewer than 40 co-sponsors arrayed against 134 Republicans who voted against it. Instead of showing conservatives' strength, the RSC budget demonstrated their relative weakness.

Only 19 current RSC members actually voted against the Medicare prescription-drug benefit, compared to 67 who voted for its enactment. The estimated price tag, conservatively speaking: \$1.2 trillion over ten years. Not for nothing did *Reason* dub them "the budget-cutters who couldn't stop spending." Pence told the libertarian magazine that there are "30 to 40 [Republican] members that have a different philosophy" than his brand of fiscal conservatism. When it comes to spending favored by President Bush and the GOP congressional leadership, however, this seems to have it exactly backwards. In those cases, Pence can only count on having 30 to 40 Republicans voting with him.

Obviously, some congressmen join the RSC to gain reputations for independence that their voting records don't justify. But to be effective, policy wonkery must be paired with strong political skills. While the RSC has no shortage of passionate and intelligent members, it doesn't have many tacticians like Newt Gingrich or Tom DeLay who, for all their problems, could at least cobble together majorities for legislation. No wonder the GOP turns instead to unprincipled K Street operators for leadership.

During the Reagan years, Republican leaders were divided between staunch conservatives who had ideas but little practical experience and moderates who understood the mechanics of government. As conservatives risk returning to that division, at least at the congressional level, they hope that an imperfect leadership will nevertheless provide results. "I think Boehner will surprise a lot of people," says Rob Jordan of FreedomWorks, a free-market grassroots organization. "I am cautiously optimistic that the party will change its ways."

In the meantime, Republican mavericks can address their shortcomings. These flaws can be seen in their public statements, which are heavy with references to Goldwater, Reagan, and the "revolution" of 1994 but light with details on how they plan to get anything done. This selective reading of recent electoral history also contributes to some of their questionable political judgments. Run-away federal spending has hurt the GOP's fiscally responsible image, for example, but it was surely less of a political liability than the war in Iraq nearly all of these conservatives still favor. It also isn't at all clear that slashing spending, however sound a policy, would bring Republicans back into the majority.

Fiscal conservatives have fared best when they have been able to convince the voters that big government is hurting the economy—think Reagan during stagflation—or corrupting the culture—like welfare in the Gingrich era. They have seldom if ever won elections by appealing to the authority of think-tank whitepapers.

The good news for Republican reformers is that many in their party desire a different course than the one followed since 2001, at least domestically if not yet abroad. Their setbacks need not be permanent—conservatives remember that after 1964 comes 1980. Mike Pence would appreciate the analogy. ■

Sins of Commission

For Bush, being tough on terror requires torture, secret prisons, and no accountability.

By James Bovard

HAVE REPUBLICANS become the party of torture, secret prisons, and indefinite detention? In his speech last month on signing the Military Commissions Act (MCA), President Bush declared that the bill “sends a clear message. ... We will never back down from the threats to our freedom.” “Rough interrogation” (a.k.a. torture) in the name of freedom may be Bush’s clearest ideological legacy.

The president endlessly reminds listeners that “the U.S. does not torture” and that “torture is not an American value.” But “What is torture?” is the Bush version of the Pontius Pilate question. He appears to be using the definition of torture crafted by Justice Department official John Yoo: if detainees weren’t maimed or killed, they weren’t tortured. And the Justice Department acts as though, even if detainees are killed during interrogations, it is best to treat the deaths as harmless errors.

The MCA was rushed through Congress in September to overturn a Supreme Court decision that struck down Bush’s military tribunals and his scorning of the Geneva Conventions. The new law—far more dangerous than the more controversial Patriot Act—is perhaps the biggest disgrace Congress has enacted since the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Stephen Gray, the author of *Ghost Plane*, notes, “The act grants fewer rights to defendants than the Nazis got at Nuremberg.”

The new law awards Bush power to label anyone on earth an enemy combatant and lock him up in perpetuity, nullifying the habeas corpus provision of the

Constitution and “turning back the clock 800 years,” as Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) said. While only foreigners can be tried before military tribunals, Americans accused of being enemy combatants can be detained indefinitely without charges and without appeal. Even though the Pentagon has effectively admitted that many of the people detained at Guantanamo were wrongfully seized and held, the MCA presumes that the president of the United States is both omniscient and always fair.

Instead of clear standards established by the legislature, the president decrees what methods of brutalizing detainees are allowed, regardless of the Geneva Conventions or the U.S. Anti-Torture Act. As Yale law professor Jack Balkin notes, “The President has created a new regime in which he is a law unto himself on issues of prisoner interrogations. He decides whether he has violated the laws, and he decides whether to prosecute the people he in turn urges to break the law.” White House press spokesman Tony Snow agreed that this law makes Bush the “final arbiter on torture.”

Though U.S. government interrogation methods have been intensely controversial around the world, most congressmen looked the other way and rubber-stamped Bush’s legislative wish list. The *Boston Globe* reported in September that “because of the Bush administration’s restrictive policy on sharing classified information with Congress, very few of the people engaged in the debate will know what they’re talking about.” Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.)

epitomized the prevailing righteous ignorance when he declared, “I don’t know what the CIA has been doing, nor should I know.” The less they know, the easier it is for Republican congressmen to deny government wrongdoing.

Since the end of the Middle Ages, civilized nations have frowned on relying on brute force to determine facts in judicial proceedings. But Monty Python appears to be the patron saint of the MCA. “Evidence” gained via coercion is admissible as long as a military judge deigns that the methods used did not rise to torture. Military commissions can accept “evidence” produced by interrogations that violated “cruel, unusual or inhumane treatment” standards—as long as such abuses occurred before Dec. 30, 2005, when Congress passed the Detainee Treatment Act. (Bush effectively vetoed this law with a signing statement.) It was nice that Congress formally picked a date for the rebirth of decency, but it doesn’t have sticking power.

The Bush team is exploiting fears about national security to practically guarantee the use of tortured confessions. For example, the Justice Department has asked a federal judge to prohibit defendant Majid Khan, a former Catonsville, Md. resident who was nabbed in Pakistan, from revealing to anyone—even his defense attorney—the interrogation methods he endured. A Justice Department spokeswoman claimed that letting Khan discuss his interrogation with his lawyer “is inadequate to protect unique and potentially highly classified information that is vital

to our country's ability to fight terrorism." Thus the feds can use whatever Khan said against him while hiding the methods that made him squeal.

The MCA creates procedural biases akin to a 1938 Moscow show trial. Defense attorneys can "challenge the use of hearsay information obtained through coercive interrogations in distant countries only if they can prove it is unreliable," the *Washington Post* noted. But it will be almost impossible to disprove an accusation when a defense lawyer is not allowed to question—or perhaps even know—who made the charge.

From early 2002, some high-ranking Bush administration officials have apparently feared that they could face prosecution for their interrogation policies. But the MCA retroactively decriminalized torture—at least such actions committed before the end of 2005. The act will make it almost impossible for victims of torture (or their survivors) to bring cases against perpetrators. The closest precedent for this blanket pardon comes not from American justice but from the amnesty laws Latin American regimes enacted to immunize military officials who carried out bloody crackdowns against leftists in the 1970s and 1980s.

Like an old-time Southern segregationist campaign, the Republican Party has proceeded to portray any congressmen who failed to vote for the MCA as a "terrorist lover." House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill) claimed that Democrats had "voted in favor of new rights for terrorists," and House Majority Leader John Boehner declared that Democrats "voted against bringing the most dangerous terrorists to justice." The National Republican Senatorial Committee denounced incumbent Democrats who voted against suspending habeas corpus for having "sided with trial lawyers and terrorists." After Bush signed the bill, a

Republican National Committee press release was headlined, "Democrats would let terrorists free."

Throughout the fall campaign, the GOP used the MCA to flaunt its "tough on terrorism" message. At a "Texas Victory Rally" on Oct. 30, Bush declared, "When it came time to vote on whether or not to allow the CIA to continue its program to detain and question captured terrorists, more than 80 percent of House Democrats voted against it." Bush coached the audience to respond to his questions as if the event were a giant DARE rally. The president asked, "When it comes to questioning terrorists, what's the Democrat's answer?" The audience roared, "Just say no!"

Aside from Bush and other Republicans' dishonest taunts of Democrats, torture was a non-issue in congressional campaigns. The *New York Times* noted, "In a season of shameless attack ads, torture is still too shameful to be debated." Few, if any, Democratic candidates had enough confidence in themselves or the voters to highlight the Bush administration's worst abuse of power.

That doesn't mean, however, that they won't use the investigative powers their new majority affords. For though Bush rhetorically takes the high ground on the torture issue, it now appears that the president may personally have blood on his hands. On Nov. 14, the ACLU released a CIA letter confirming the existence of "a directive signed by President Bush granting the CIA the authority to set up detention facilities outside the United States and outlining interrogation methods that may be used against detainees." This confirms a May 2004 e-mail from the FBI's "On Scene Commander" in Baghdad stating that U.S. military officials in Iraq assured him that a secret presidential executive order permitted extreme interrogation techniques considered illegal by the FBI including "sensory deprivation through

the use of hoods," stress positions, and military dogs.

The Justice Department has so far blocked release of the actual document, but a federal judge may force the feds to cough it up. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), the incoming chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, is also demanding to see the document. If this Bush letter does hit the streets, it may be akin to a 1972 memo from Richard Nixon specifying the exact methods of lock-picking the Watergate burglars should use. Bush's involvement in the torture scandal may be far deeper than Nixon's involvement in Watergate.

The Bush secret ruling on interrogation methods may explain the Justice Department's passivity on torture cases. The CIA Inspector General recommended that the Justice Department prosecute a CIA agent involved in the demise of an Iraqi detainee at Abu Ghraib. As *The New Yorker* reported, Manadel al-Jamadi died during an interrogation in which his head was covered in a plastic bag and he was "shackled in a crucifixion-like pose that inhibited his ability to breathe." This was one of at least eight cases the CIA referred for prosecution, including cases of homicides during CIA interrogations in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the Justice Department refuses to prosecute any of the alleged torturers. The feds cannot bring charges against CIA agents without risking public disclosure of the presidential order authorizing the torture of detainees.

As long as the Justice Department doesn't prosecute federal torturers, Bush can continue denying U.S. torture. People killed during interrogations thus remain the exceptions that prove the rule that the U.S. never tortures. The military classified the deaths of at least 34 detainees as suspected or confirmed homicides; the CIA has released no tally of its morgue entries.

The New Yorker noted, “under the Bush administration’s secret interrogation guidelines, the killing of Jamadi might not have broken any laws.” Unfortunately, there is no reason to assume that Bush has not given interrogators a license to kill. Steven Bradbury, head of the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel, told a closed session of the Senate Intelligence Committee early this year that Bush could order killings of suspected terrorists within the United States. When *Newsweek* contacted the Justice Department to verify this novel legal doctrine, spokeswoman Tasia Scolinos stressed that Bradbury’s comments occurred during an “off-the-record briefing.” Any Bush-ordered killings within the United States would also presumably be off the record.

President Bush has been able to seize nearly boundless power because his administration has been able to control what Americans know. But this control is crumbling. Democratic congressional investigations, court cases, and the military tribunals themselves could unearth far more damaging documents and photographs than anything seen thus far.

The MCA is “enabling act” legislation that preserves the appearance of law while empowering the commander in chief to do as he pleases. Bush’s torture policies may signal that he accepts the dicta of Richard Nixon: “When the president does it, that means that it is not illegal.” But the firewall of high approval ratings that buttressed Bush when the first Abu Ghraib photos leaked is gone. The media is exasperated with the administration’s penchant for secrecy. Much of Bush’s conservative intellectual bodyguard has given up the fight. It remains to be seen how much dunking, thumping, and cold water the Bush team can survive. ■

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Prisoners’ Dilemma

Indefinite detention of terrorist suspects poses a challenge to America’s most valuable legal traditions.

By Gerald J. Russello

THE RECENTLY ENACTED Military Commissions Act and the Supreme Court *Hamdi* and *Hamdan* decisions, which tried to limit the suspension of the protections of habeas corpus, have spurred a new series of debates on the somewhat technical legal area of habeas corpus. The Great Writ, as it was known, stands for a very simple principle: power does not trump. A government may wish to detain someone secretly, perhaps indefinitely, and may believe it has good reasons to do so, but in the Anglo-American legal tradition, that is not good enough. As the Supreme Court stated in 1969, the writ is “the fundamental instrument for safeguarding individual freedom against arbitrary and lawless state action.” The government therefore has to “produce the body for examination,” as the translation of the full Latin tag put it, before a magistrate and justify the reasons for the person’s detention.

The position announced in the MCA and its related statutes may or may not be bad policy for defeating terrorism, but it certainly undermines a key component of free government. Government must in the normal course act in the open and must be held to a standard of reasonableness as to its actions, including being forced to explain why it has decided to detain someone. In the American legal tradition, and more broadly that of the West in general, providing the protections of habeas corpus has been a mark of civilizational achievement and we rightly

consider those countries that do not do this to be less developed.

Americans across the political spectrum support the general principle of habeas corpus, but the war on terror has created opposing views about its application. On the one hand, some, mostly conservatives, have supported the government’s authority to hold possible enemy combatants in foreign countries or at home without charge or judicial process. For them, the exigencies of the new threats to our safety justify reconsideration of traditional civil liberties. Others, generally liberals, have sought to extend the Constitution’s guarantee of habeas corpus to anyone brought within the power of the American government, even non-citizens captured in military operations abroad. For this side, the war on terror is analogized to the civil-rights movement and seen as another area for expansion of rights beyond their traditional scope.

While both sides are playing to their respective bases, the dispute is real, and each side has legitimate arguments to which it can turn. It is clear, however, that no one had thought out the situation that has led to the MCA beforehand. This is especially the case for those supporting the war, for whom the conquest would be a “cakewalk” and the possibility of holding persons for over three years in military facilities, if ever considered, was never stated publicly. As a result of its invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States is now

presented with thousands of people of uncertain status who have been transported far from their homes, who have been collected into facilities indefinitely, and who have no real redress in either American courts or through the military justice process. The *Hamdan* decision does not solve this: the case merely holds that for those people determined by a tribunal to be enemy combatants, habeas protections apply to a degree; however, the government has no obligation to ever determine when someone is an enemy combatant, casting these individuals into jurisprudential no-man's land. This situation has no real precedent in American history, and one can feel some sympathy for those trying to wrestle with the legal and political issues the war on terror has caused and the strain it has put on constitutional government.

With its actions in Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and elsewhere, the United States has entered unknown territory, and is walking the knife edge between retaining the clear characteristics of a free republic and becoming something else. Some people have taken to calling this new entity an empire, but that is true only in certain respects. Because of its refusal to acknowledge any intent to occupy or govern conquered territories as its own possessions, preferring a policy of democratizing "rogue states," what may be emerging is more of a perpetual war state, preparing for and engaging endless combat against "terror."

Whatever it is called, one of the features of this emerging entity is the stratification within it of individuals based on their status—from full citizens down to those awaiting "enemy combatant" designations who are basically at the whim of the government. That too is an unfortunate side effect of imperial ambition—and one, perhaps not coincidentally, reflected in the maze of classifications and status designations in the immigra-

tion law. In one case, there is a class of guest workers abroad, who are not citizens but are useful for domestic policy; the other is a class of guest detainees serving a similar purpose for foreign policy.

But here is the tricky part: a state action can be "lawless," in the language of the Supreme Court, only if it violates some law. In American jurisprudence that means statutory law or the Constitution. So if the law does not apply to foreigners, as respectable conservative argument might propose, what is the big deal? The Constitution provides that the right of habeas corpus may be abrogated only "when in cases of Rebellion or Invasion the Public Safety may require it." This language was clearly intended to cover a limited crisis whose end could be determined with some certainty. Rebellion and invasion have commonsense, widely understood meanings. It is obviously far from clear how this limited exception may interact with an endless war on terror, with no clear

beliefs of a people. This is where those advocating universal application of habeas fall short: their "rights talk" ignores the flaws of that theory of rights as it has been applied to areas ranging from criminal procedure to religious freedom: endless assertion of right against right (here, the right of habeas corpus against that of national self-defense) makes political life impossible. And their rush to support the *Hamdan* Court's reliance on the Geneva Conventions or international law is clearly only a fig leaf for their own preferred outcomes. If the Conventions permitted slavery or torture, they would not be considered so persuasive.

But in pushing for limitations on habeas corpus, conservatives are ignoring their own best traditions. Conservatives are rightly suspicious of government, or at least they are with respect to the efficient provision of health care or welfare; it has been less so recently on issue of war. But the *Hamdi* decision perfectly illustrates the reasons for con-

WITH ITS ACTIONS IN **GUANTANAMO BAY, ABU GHRAIB**, AND ELSEWHERE, THE **UNITED STATES IS WALKING THE KNIFE EDGE** BETWEEN RETAINING THE CLEAR CHARACTERISTICS OF A **FREE REPUBLIC** AND **BECOMING SOMETHING ELSE**.

guideposts or defined enemies. The Constitution does not directly address the question of what to do with these detainees.

Habeas corpus is not a universal right protecting one from being hauled up and locked away. Nor is it some irrevocable principle like the law of gravity. But that is not the end of the story. As conservatives well know, historical experience and development, even with its recognized flaws, is a surer safeguard of liberty than an appeal to vague or expansive "rights" and must be sustained by the customs, conventions, and

servative suspicion: there the government wanted to detain a citizen without habeas corpus simply because it determined he was an "enemy combatant." The Supreme Court, in a set of divided opinions, put a stop to that nonsense, but the fact that the case had to come before the Court at all should serve as a reminder to conservatives that the nature of a centralizing power is to strengthen itself.

The debate over extending habeas protections is echoed in the debate over torture. The debate over torture is basically on utilitarian terms: how many

terrorists are worth torturing, and to what degree, in exchange for saving how many lives? A form of this utilitarian calculus is at play as well in the habeas corpus debate. The thinking seems to be that the greater the number of detainees, the less harm will come to us. But this is the wrong approach. The practice of torture is corrupting to us, as well as damaging to those we torture, because the practice degrades us. Once a society starts arguing about when such coercive methods are “appropriate,” it has already begun to condone permitting its own citizens to brutalize and debase themselves as well as harm their victims. Similarly with habeas corpus: while those subject to the MCA are being ill served, getting citizens used to the having large numbers of foreigners held at our mercy is corrosive and corruptive of our liberty. Once a nation grows accustomed to the idea that it may hold some people without trial indefinitely, it is easier to dissolve the characteristic—citizenship—that is marked out as the reason for different treatment.

The habeas corpus debate, much like our debate over the uses of torture, betrays the absolutist mind lurking beneath much of American idealism. According to this mindset, recognized by conservatives such as Robert Nisbet over 40 years ago, the “moral and political aspirations” of foreign policy blind us to realities on the ground. Here a great injustice is being done to many people within the direct power of the United States to help, and all the talk of promoting democracy or defeating the terror masters will not hide that. ■

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The Party's Over

The 2006 midterms were more significant than Republican strategists want to admit.

By Martin Sieff

SHRED THE PREDICTABLE SPIN that the midterm elections were of no consequence. What happened on Nov. 7 was seismic: the Fall of the House of Neocon has begun. Bush partisans are calling it Black Tuesday, but it may prove bright for old-fashioned conservative constitutionalists and naïve believers in traditional liberties. All is, as my Irish countryman W.B. Yeats memorably said, “changed, changed utterly.”

Many of the Republicans' mightiest pillars are gone from the House of Representatives and the Senate—probably never to return. George Allen, once full of presidential promise, ran arguably the most bungled senatorial campaign in American history. Rick Santorum, distinguished in his waning days by increasingly fierce denunciations of Islamofascism, was toppled in Pennsylvania. Mike DeWine, another ecstatic partisan of eternal war, was politically annihilated in Ohio. Conrad Burns is gone in Montana. Bush's global adventure proved toxic to them all. Add the forced departure of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, and the K Street Project was in ruins even before Nancy Pelosi played Alaric the Goth to the imperial dreamers and rode triumphant into their capitol.

This was no routine erosion of support for an effective two-term president in his last midterm election as the Prophet Krauthammer opined the morning after. No Republican president has lost a GOP-controlled House and Senate

since Dwight D. Eisenhower did in 1954—52 years ago. And in that generation of post-FDR, post-New Deal domination by the Democrats, the “me-too” liberal Republicans felt lucky to have held on that long. But 2006 was not 1954. It was not even 1994, when Bill Clinton was stunned by the loss of both chambers to a resurgent conservative Republican Party. It was not even 1946 when the Democrats lost 55 seats in the House—close to twice the number they gained this year.

Truman, Eisenhower, and Clinton all lost control of this House in their first midterm elections as president. But all three won handsomely two years later, coasting home in times of peace and prosperity. It remains to be seen if the nation will be prosperous two years from now: the record deficits Bush has run up are neither conservative nor reassuring. But thanks to Iraq, America will surely not be at peace if Bush sticks to his determination to “stay the course.” Whatever else it is, that is a sure recipe for a Democratic presidential victory in 2008. Adlai Stevenson could not shake the burden of Korea that Truman had bequeathed him in 1952, and Hubert Humphrey suffered the same weight with Vietnam on his back thanks to LBJ in 1968. Whoever the GOP runs in 2008 will face the same problem.

In fact, the recent midterms produced a far more serious result for Bush and the GOP than the elections of 1950 and 1966 did for the incumbent Democrats

of those times. Control of Congress did not change hands in the middle of a war on either of those occasions. It has now—making 2006 far worse for the incumbent president than 1950 or 1966. This was 1930 redux: George W. Bush has turned into Herbert Hoover.

In 1930, longstanding Republican domination was swept away in the House of Representatives. The cause was the Great Depression, then 13 months old and over the next two years fated to get much worse—just as the self-inflicted crisis the U.S. is facing in the Middle East looks fated to get far worse over the next two years.

Like George W. Bush, Hoover was a genuine conservative in his own imagination only, and the capture of the House in 1930 gave the Democrats a powerful platform from which they could rip him apart and prepare the way for their own capture of the presidency in 1932. For contrary to recent wishful thinking by the Republicans, the party that controls Congress does not share the blame for catastrophes that come on their watch as long as they campaign against them. Failure, as John Kennedy famously said, is an orphan.

Bush, the least bipartisan of presidents for his first six years in power when he was riding high, can cry all he wants now about wanting to work with Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid. They and their majorities are going to spend the next two years tearing him apart.

The loss of both houses of Congress dealt catastrophic blows to Bush's two main strategic priorities. First, the administration can no longer suppress investigation of their manipulation of intelligence to justify the Iraq War or of the profiteering that major interests eager for the war made from their administration cronies. Both Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), running the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), chairing the

Government Reform Committee in the House, are eager to shine their investigative spotlights.

Levin can count on support from Virginia's promising new junior senator, Jim Webb and from Missouri's new standard-bearer, the underestimated Sen. Claire McCaskill. Webb is a Vietnam combat vet outraged by the spider webs of incompetence, greed, and deceit that wove the scenario for Iraq. And McCaskill was state auditor in Missouri, exactly the kind of background needed to uncover the scams in the half-trillion dollar annual war and defense budget. She has a very un-Beltway instinct for examining numbers and identifying those that don't add up.

Second, and even worse for the Republicans, they had to retain control of both houses to keep the Democrats safely marginalized and prevented from presenting any serious challenge for the presidency in 2008. Instead, winning control of both houses gives the Dems a national platform that even the supine media in Washington cannot ignore.

Gaining control of the Congress and its investigative powers was always going to be essential if the Democrats were to have any hope of retaking the White House in 2008. With the press more uncritical and cautious towards the executive branch than at any previous period in modern American history, the Dems desperately needed at least one of the two houses of Congress to be able to use its committees to focus media attention and embarrass the incumbent party.

Only four times in the past century have opposition parties managed to win the presidency without controlling at least one chamber of Congress during the previous two years. It first occurred in 1912, when the Republicans split down the middle thanks to Theodore Roosevelt's egomaniacal crusade against William Howard Taft, letting in

Woodrow Wilson. It did not happen again for 40 years until Eisenhower swept into power in 1952 at the height of the Korean War. The next time it occurred, 16 years later, was when the Democratic Party was torn apart by race riots, antiwar violence, and the assassinations of that year. Finally, it happened in 1980 when Ronald Reagan won the presidency from Jimmy Carter after more than a year of the Iran hostage humiliation. On three of those four occasions, a divisive, unpopular war or lasting foreign-policy crisis was directly responsible for toppling the incumbent president and/or his party from control of the executive branch.

Since 1994, except for the anomalous few months from the Jeffords defection in the Senate, the Republicans have enjoyed the advantage of majority and pushed it to the max. They used it to attack Clinton and then to prevent any serious investigation of Bush, Rumsfeld, and their neocon minions.

But the Rovian drive to turn America into a one-party state is now doomed to fail. The president has been repudiated by a national popular mandate more sweeping than the one that, he claimed, exempted him from any accountability in 2004. The American people voted unambiguously against policies of imperialism, aggression, corruption, and unaccountability. They voted against leaving the architects of the Iraq War unaccountable for the 2,800 American dead and the 21,000 seriously wounded. And they voted to retain the freedom of speech, political openness, and constitutional liberties that have made this nation the wonder and admiration of the world for more than 230 years.

You don't have to be a liberal or a Democrat—and I'm neither—to celebrate that vote. ■

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How to Lose an Army

Plow deep into Iraq and dare Iran to strike.

By William S. Lind

LOSE A WAR, lose an election. What else did the Republicans expect? That is especially true for a “war of choice,” which is to say a war we should not have fought. It is difficult to imagine that, had Spain defeated the U.S. in 1898, the Republicans would have won the election in 1900.

What does the Democrats’ victory mean for the war in Iraq? Regrettably, not what it should, namely an immediate American withdrawal from a hopelessly lost enterprise. Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans, both of whom now want to get out, desire to go into the 2008 election as the party that “lost Iraq,” which is how taking the lead for withdrawal could be painted. Instead, both parties in Congress and the White House are likely to agree only on a series of half-measures, none of which will work. We will stay bogged down in the Iraqi quagmire for another two years, as the troops caught in Operation Provide Targets continue to die.

A more critical if less obvious question is what do the results of the election mean for a prospective attack on Iran? On the surface, the Democrats’ seizure of both houses of Congress would seem to be good news. Having won their majorities because the American people want out of a war, they ought to be reluctant to jump into a second one.

Regrettably, that logic may be too simple. Because an attack on Iran will be launched with no warning, the Bush administration will not have to consult Congress beforehand. Congress could

take the initiative and forbid such an attack preemptively (“no funds may be expended...”). But in an imperial capital where court politics count far more than the nation’s interests, Democrats may prefer to risk a second war, and a second debacle, rather than open themselves up to a charge of being weak on terrorism. The Democrats’ approach to national-security issues through the fall campaign was to hide under the bed and ignore them as much as possible. That worked politically, so they are likely to stick with it.

The Bush administration, for its part, will be tempted to do what small men have done throughout history when in trouble: try to escalate their way out of it. The White House has already half-convinced itself that the majority of its troubles in Iraq stem from Iran and Syria, a line the neocons push assiduously.

The departure of Donald Rumsfeld, which was greeted in the Pentagon with joyful choruses of “Ding-dong, the witch is dead,” may help to avert an invasion. His successor, Robert Gates, has no background in defense and is therefore likely to defer to the generals, for good or for ill. In this case for good, as the generals emphatically do not want a war with Iran. But for Gates to block White House demands for an attack on Iran, he would have to threaten to resign. Is he the sort of man to do that? That’s not how bureaucrats build their careers, an observation that holds for the generals as well.

The elephant in the parlor is, of course, the fact that Israel wants an attack on Iran, and for Republicans and Democrats alike, Israel is She Who Must Be Obeyed. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert ran to Washington as soon as the election was over, and the subject of his discussions with President Bush is easy to imagine. Who will do the dirty deed and when? Iran has already announced that it will consider an attack by Israel an attack by the U.S. as well and respond accordingly, so the difference may not much matter.

That response should concern us, to put it mildly, for that is where a war with Iran and the war in Iraq intersect. The Iranians have said that this time they have 140,000 American hostages, in the form of U.S. troops in Iraq. If either Israel or the U.S. attacks Iran, we could lose an army.

How could such a thing happen? The danger springs from the fact that almost all the supplies our forces in Iraq use, including vital fuel for their vehicles, comes over one supply line, which runs toward the south and the port in Kuwait. If that line were cut, our forces might not have enough fuel to get out of Iraq. American armies are enormously fuel-thirsty.

One might think that fuel would be abundant in Iraq, which is (or was) a major oil exporter. In fact, because of the ongoing chaos, Iraq is short of refined oil products. Our forces, if cut off from their own logistics, could not simply fuel up at local gas stations as

German Gen. Heinz Guderian's Panzer Corps did on its way to the English Channel in the 1940 campaign against France.

There are two ways, not mutually exclusive, that Iran could attempt to cut our supply line in Iraq in response to an attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. The first would be by encouraging Shi'ite militias to which it is allied, including the Mahdi Army and the Badr Brigades, to rise up against us throughout southern Iraq, which is Shi'ite country. The militias would be supported by widespread infiltration of Iranian Revolutionary Guards, who have shown themselves to be good at this kind of thing. They are the people who trained and equipped Hezbollah for its successful defense of southern Lebanon against the vaunted Israeli army this past summer.

The Shi'ite militias already lie across our single supply line, and we should expect them to cut it in response to Iranian requests. We are already at war with the Mahdi Army, against which our forces in Iraq have been launching a series of recent raids and air strikes. A British journalist I know, one with long experience in Iraq, told me he asked the head of SCIRI, which controls the Badr Brigades, how he would respond if the U.S. attacked Iran. "Then," he replied, "we would do our duty."

Iran has a second, bolder option it could combine with a Shi'ite insurrection at our rear. It could cross the Iran-Iraq border with several armored and mechanized divisions of the regular Iranian Army, sever our supply lines, then move to roll us up from the south with the aim of encircling us, perhaps in and around Baghdad. This would be a classic operational maneuver, the sort of thing for which armored forces are designed.

At present, U.S. forces in Iraq could be vulnerable to such an action by the Iranian army. We have no field army in

Iraq; necessarily, our forces are penny-packeted all over the place, dealing with insurgents. They would be hard-pressed to assemble quickly to meet a regular force, especially if fuel was running short.

The U.S. military's answer, as is too often the case, will be air power. It is true that American air power could destroy any Iranian armored formations it caught in the open. But there is a tried-and-true defense against air power, one the Iranians could employ: bad weather. Like the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge, they could wait to launch their offensive until the weather promised a few days of protection. After that, they would be so close to our own forces that air power could not attack them without danger of hitting friendlies. (This is sometimes known as "hugging tactics.") Reportedly, the Turkish General Staff thinks the Iranians can and will employ this second option, no doubt in combination with the first.

Perhaps the greatest danger lies in the fact that, just as the French high command refused to consider the possibility of a German attack through the Ardennes in 1940, Washington will not consider the possibility that an attack on Iran could cost us our army in Iraq. We have made one of the most common military mistakes—believing our own propaganda. Over and over, the U.S. military tells the world and itself, "No one can defeat us. No one can even fight us. We are the greatest military the world has ever seen!"

Unfortunately, like most propaganda, it's bunk. The U.S. Armed Forces are technically well-trained, lavishly resourced Second-Generation militaries. They are today being fought and beaten by Fourth-Generation opponents in Iraq and Afghanistan. They can also be defeated by Third-Generation opponents who can react faster than America's process-ridden, PowerPoint-enslaved military

headquarters. They can be defeated by superior strategy, by trick, by surprise, and by preemption. Unbeatable militaries are like unsinkable ships: they are unsinkable until something sinks them.

If the U.S. were to lose the army it has in Iraq to Iraqi militias, Iranian regular forces, or a combination of both, cutting our one line of supply and then encircling us, the world would change. It would be our Adrianople, our Rocroi, our Stalingrad. American power and prestige would never recover. Nothing, not even Israel's demands, should lead us to run this risk, which is inherent in any attack on Iran.

There is one action, a possibility opened by the Democrats' electoral victory, that would stop the Bush administration from launching such an attack or allowing Israel to do so. If our senior military leaders, especially the Joint Chiefs of Staff, would go public with their opposition to such an adventure, the new Democratic majority in Congress would have to react. The public that put it in office on an antiwar platform would compel it to answer or lose all credibility. While the Joint Chiefs would infuriate the White House, they would receive the necessary political cover from the new Democratic Congress. The potential is there, for the generals and the Democrats alike.

For it to be realized, and the disaster of war with Iran to be averted, all the generals must do is show some courage. If the Joint Chiefs keep silent now and allow the folly of an attack on Iran to go forward, they will share in full the moral responsibility for the results, which may include the loss of an army. Perhaps we should call it "Operation Cornwallis." ■

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Taliban, Take Two

Five years later, our original foe in the war on terror is reversing an easy American victory.

By Jason Motlagh

FIVE YEARS AFTER the Taliban fled to the mountains, Kabul felt normal. French Army Capt. Eric Morgand of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan had agreed to take me on a morning patrol of the capital's periphery and an outlying village. Locals scarcely seemed to care as our convoy of VB-2L "Mad Max" light armored vehicles rumbled past. Billboards for better cellphone coverage and cheaper flights to Dubai lined streets choked with dust and traffic, while ubiquitous homemade kites danced above the warrens of earthen homes that recede up steep mountain flanks. Half-built mini-mansions, of the tasteless variety that betray fast and illicit wealth, smacked of a comeback.

But less than a mile away, in the heart of downtown, Afghan police were busy cleaning up carnage: a suicide bomber had detonated earlier in the morning one block from my hotel, killing a dozen people and injuring scores more as they waited outside the Interior Ministry. "They've done it again," a shopkeeper said in disgust as I stumbled half awake into the clamor to see a bus speeding off with bodies strewn across its floor. Panicked authorities armed with truncheons were at a loss to control the streets.

* * *

Kabul is no Baghdad. But it is showing symptoms of a virus that has crept inward after being allowed to fester at Afghanistan's extremities. Insurgents,

led by a more sophisticated Taliban that has regrouped in lawless tribal areas along the Afghan-Pakistani border, are copying tactics minted in Iraq to destabilize vast swathes of the southern and eastern backcountry and make their presence felt in urban centers where they lack a foothold. Suicide terrorism, once alien to the country, has skyrocketed. Some 90 suicide bombings have been recorded this year, more than the total of all such attacks in Afghan history. Western intelligence agencies say foreign jihadis are coming back to train and terrorize. Improvised explosive devices are used with greater lethality than ever before. And state officials are being targeted in a deliberate campaign to erode what faith remains in a corrupt government that has failed to deliver security and basic services. According to Joanna Nathan, a Kabul-based senior analyst with the International Crisis Group, "Insurgents [have] become increasingly bold and use terror to act in areas they can't control. ... They know it is a way of driving a wedge between the people and the administration."

Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld tried to paint a rosier picture in an Oct. 8 *Washington Post* op-ed. Playing down the insurgency, he touted the opening of a Coca-Cola bottling plant in Kabul as another harbinger of a resilient national economy that has tripled in the past five years and is projected to increase by another 20 percent in 2007. What he failed to point out is that five

years after the Taliban's fall catapulted popular hopes, narcotics account for about half of the Afghan gross domestic product. Outside of Kabul, the United Nations says that schools are burnt at the rate of nearly one per day, aid workers and now journalists have been killed and abducted, and typically stoic Afghans swear that major roads built to integrate the country are a no-go. Violent attacks—up fourfold to more than 600 a month as of the end of September—have been recorded in all but two of the country's 34 provinces, some of which are infested with militants. A U.S. military official recently conceded that nine of 21 districts in Ghazni province, about an hour's drive south of the capital, have "significant Taliban influence."

* * *

Today's Taliban—made up of a loose alliance of veteran fighters, youngsters educated in Pakistani madrasas, drug traffickers, smugglers and poor, frustrated farmers vulnerable to their advances—has a different complexion than its ascetic forerunner. In the words of one local security official in the restive Helmand province, "some are joining the Taliban, some are worsening the situation in the name of the Taliban." The bearded zealots that previously cracked down on opium production have made arrangements of convenience with criminal networks and farmers in exchange for kickbacks to bankroll their insurgency. Recruits are

said to receive double the wages of Afghan army troops and four times what police are paid, along with better weapons. Not a hard sell to those stuck without viable alternatives.

Over the summer, emboldened Taliban clashed with elements of the roughly 40,000-strong NATO and U.S. troop forces in standing gun battles across southeastern provinces in the bloodiest fighting since the hardline movement was toppled by the 2001 U.S.-led invasion. ISAF claims to have killed more than 1,000 militants in September's Operation Medusa. Taliban commanders counter that they have hundreds of men and are prepared to wage a low-intensity war through the winter—a time hostilities typically come to a halt—and continue for as long as it takes to grind down Western resolve. “By the will of Allah, the fight will intensify in the coming few months,” Mullah Omar, the one-eyed Taliban leader with a \$10-million bounty on his head said in a statement late last month. “Our predictions about the war have proved right in the past. I am confident the fighting will be a surprise for many.”

Unlike the old Taliban that banned television from 1996-2001, this missive was posted on the Internet. The movement has turned to modern propaganda methods in a bid to co-opt Osama bin Laden's global franchise, demonstrated by a presence on some 30 percent of more than 4,000 jihadi websites and radio stations, according to the Center for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS) in Kabul. DVDs of NATO civilian casualties and videos of Iraqi beheadings are in circulation, along with the first-ever recorded suicide testimony of an Afghan man from Khost province who later killed 13 people when he blew himself up at a Kabul military training center. Mullah Omar himself is reportedly featured in one tape surveying militants at the frontline of a battleground.

The Taliban's information war is full throttle on the ground in and around its stronghold of Kandahar province. Anti-government leaflets and pictures are distributed by hand, and the grassroots advantage of being able to speak in the local Pashtun dialect gives added leverage among illiterate farmers prone to intimidation. Insurgents have erected fake checkpoints to monitor critical roadways such as the Kabul-Kandahar highway, a one-time poster project that has become something of a death trap that Afghans themselves are loathe to travel. Roving bands are known to stop vehicles and confiscate mobile telephones, punishing people they determine to have Western contacts. “Taliban tokens” are issued to some highway travelers to regulate human traffic,

more I was led to believe that conditions had completely changed,” he said. “The perception has now come to many that [NATO's] understanding was not correct. And so they have to recalibrate their strategy, resources and manpower to deal with the threat. We have a military battle we're fighting. But at the same time we need to do so in a holistic manner with enough resources going towards development.”

* * *

Air Force Lt. Col. Donald Koehler and his Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team understand that guerrilla insurgencies cannot be beaten by military might alone. One of 24 outfits at work behind the scenes from the Herat poppy heartland to volatile Kandahar, the PRT is

OVER THE SUMMER, **EMBOLDENED TALIBAN CLASHED** WITH ELEMENTS OF THE **40,000-STRONG NATO AND U.S. TROOP FORCES** IN STANDING GUN BATTLES IN THE **BLOODIEST FIGHTING SINCE THE 2001 U.S.-LED INVASION.**

according to CAPS. In one instance, clean-shaven Taliban disguised as police pulled over a bus and asked passengers if they worked for the local government. Those who stepped forward were never heard from again.

CAPS founder Hekmat Karzai, a nephew of President Hamid Karzai, explained at his Kabul office that the Taliban has evolved to view itself as “part of the global jihad. The Taliban that we knew before [is] not the same Taliban—tactically, ideologically and strategically.” He decided to start his organization this year to bring a grounded perspective to issues threatening Afghan stability after realizing too many Western experts dismissed the Taliban as a “spent force.” Evidence at home indicated otherwise. “The more I came back to Afghanistan to do research, the

building on a development model created specifically for Afghanistan with the blessing of President Karzai. They have built schools, government outposts, deep wells, and bridges in Kapisa and Parwan, hardscrabble provinces north of the capital where a few hundred Taliban foot soldiers are known to hide out.

One crisp afternoon in the valley hamlet of Mahmud Ragi, local officials, village elders, and Islamic clerics assembled with PRT leaders to break ground on a new road they hope will facilitate commerce and boost faith in the central government, moving residents to reject the Taliban. Koehler stressed that his team tries to keep a low profile and put an “Afghan face on projects as much as possible,” relying heavily on local manpower to improve and sustain homegrown capacity. The rusted carcasses of

Soviet tanks that dot the countryside, leftovers from the 1979-89 Afghan-Soviet war, are a grim reminder of the perils of occupation—literal or perceived.

The threat of Taliban ambushes, which have twice occurred, has not deterred PRT members from going to extreme lengths to interact with locals in order to prioritize aid projects. This was evident at the outset of Ramadan, the month-long Muslim fasting period, when a load of food was delivered to the local mullah who, in turn, would distribute the goods to the community. “We are thankful for what the Americans are doing here,” said Mohammed Qasim, a former mujahedin commander who lost an eye fighting the communists. “Yes, we should still expect more from our government, but we need to be patient.”

WELL-PLACED OBSERVERS INSIST THAT A **CRITICAL WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TO STABILIZE THE COUNTRY** AFTER THE DEFEAT OF THE TALIBAN WAS **SQUANDERED** WHEN NATION BUILDING IN **IRAQ TOOK CENTER STAGE.**

Anti-American sentiment remains low among the majority of Afghans. Instead, they tend to reserve their harshest comments for the Karzai regime, a rag-tag national army, and often-predatory police force one taxi driver likened to “the dirt on a dog’s feet.” Results of the largest-ever opinion survey, financed by the U.S. Agency for International Development, shows that while the overall mood is far from fatalistic, 20 percent less of the population believes the country is heading in the right direction than did on the eve of the 2004 elections. Well-placed observers insist that a critical window of opportunity to stabilize the country after the defeat of the Taliban was squandered when nation building in Iraq took center stage. Meanwhile, a scathing report by the Senlis Council, an international

policy think tank that has covered Afghanistan extensively, went so far as to claim that the Taliban has regained control of the southern half of the country largely due to “ineffective and inflammatory military and counter-narcotics policies” that are losing hearts and minds. NATO and Afghan officials have shot back that this is a myopic exaggeration, citing project success stories and insurgent death tolls.

Yet there is no disputing hard numbers: \$82.5 billion has been spent on military operations since 2002 versus just \$7.3 billion on development, a 900 percent disparity. Swelling ranks of Taliban foot soldiers and a greater frequency of attacks have piqued fears that the country is at a tipping point. British Gen. David Richards, commander of NATO

forces in Afghanistan, recently gave his blunt assessment of the Afghan psyche: “They will say, ‘We do not want the Taliban, but then we would rather have that austere and unpleasant life that that might involve than another five years of fighting.’” If NATO does not fast-track tangible economic improvements to the country, he estimated some 70 percent of Afghans would soon get behind the Taliban.

In late September, President Karzai traveled to Washington to gain aid assurances from President Bush and ask him to bring pressure to bear on a two-faced Pakistan. While President Pervez Musharraf has pledged his country to be a U.S. ally in the war on terror, it is no secret that his intelligence service has actively supported the Taliban. Complicating matters is a new truce signed

with Pashtun elders in North Waziristan, a fiercely resistant region that been a sanctuary to al-Qaeda. NATO says attacks launched from the area into eastern Afghanistan have surged by 300 percent since the deal was inked. And the plot has thickened: about 80 people died in an Oct. 31 Pakistani gunship strike on a religious school the military said was fronting for a terrorist training center, further threatening Musharraf’s efforts to persuade tribesman to back his government over the Taliban and al-Qaeda. A Nov. 9 suicide reprisal by an alleged pro-Taliban insurgent that killed at least 42 Pakistani troops has served notice of worse to come.

Still more troublesome is Baluchistan province in the south, where Taliban leadership uses the city of Quetta as a command center to stage brazen cross-border attacks into Kandahar and Helmand provinces. The consensus is that unless the borderlands are tamed, Taliban and other Islamist militants will always have a rear base to fall back on and reboot. In a July 2005 interview with al-Jazeera, Taliban commander Mullah Dadullah made no secret of the war plan: “Our tactics now are hit and run; we attack certain locations, kill the enemies of Allah there, and retreat to safe bases in the mountains to preserve our mujaheddin. ... We decide the time and place of our attacks; in this way the enemy is always guessing. ... We will always retreat to our safe bases.” U.S. special forces teams given the near impossible task of rooting out insurgents are largely chasing shadows across hostile terrain. As long as this continues, unconfirmed NATO body counts are a shallow measure of success.

* * *

To hear the breathless mayor of Dakowye Payan tell it, nothing in Afghanistan is a foregone conclusion. “We hate the Taliban, and if they come down here we

will fight them to the death—every man, woman and child,” Mohamadin Malek said, gesturing to the gaggle of village children standing behind him, six of which he said were his own. Captain Morgand’s convoy had crossed into the fertile Shomali Plain, where Northern Alliance irregulars reinforced by U.S. forces on horseback routed the last of the Taliban holdouts before taking back Kabul. Seated on a carpet under the shade of cherry tree, French officers listened intently for the better part of an hour as the mayor told of his village’s turnaround. Landmines planted by the Taliban have been removed, schools are rebuilt, and a select few pupils have left for Kabul to attend university. “There is no unemployment at all,” he added with pride. “We are mostly tailors, known for our shalwar kameez.” When the status report finally ran dry, officers asked detailed questions and took notes. A survey of on-looking faces revealed not a wrinkle of disdain for the soldiers’ presence. When it came time to return to base, the mayor promised a meal would be prepared upon the next visit.

The newly tarmacked road back to Kabul keeps communities like Dakowye Payan well within the orbit of security and commerce. Yet even here a fluid insurgency keeps eyes trained on the hills. Moments after departure, Captain Morgand ordered the convoy to halt after lookouts up front spotted suspicious movement high in the distance. “My man thinks someone has been watching us from up there,” he said, binoculars raised. “Could be Taliban.” Back and forth he scanned the jagged ridgeline for signs of the enemy, but the horizon lay still. ■

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Using a block of clay to simulate a bomb, Paris airport workers have made a video demonstrating how easy it is to smuggle an explosive onto a civilian airliner

at Charles de Gaulle Airport. The airport’s principal union is supporting seven Muslim employees who are appealing their recent and well-publicized suspension of security clearances. The union claims that the workers in question have received stringent background checks and have been reliable employees for years while many employees of private-sector contractors working on security at the airport are hardly monitored at all. To make their point, the fake bomb was brought into the airport and onto the plane through various security checkpoints manned by contracted security. There were numerous failures to adhere to airport regulations, and no one even questioned the person who was doing the filming. The bomb passed into a secure area, then into an area controlled by the French Air Postal service Chronopost, then into a non-secure staff canteen, and finally back into a secure area where airplanes were loading.



An American engineer of Indian descent, who has been indicted for passing military secrets to China and Israel, could face the death penalty.

Noshir Gowadia, a former employee of Northrop Grumman and Los Alamos National Laboratory, was a professor of aeronautics at Purdue University prior to his arrest. The indictment, sealed to protect classified information, states that Gowadia sold stealth and cruise-missile technology, considered to be among the most sensitive high-tech defense information. Gowadia, who was apparently motivated by money and not ideology, traveled to China six times between 2003 and 2005 and reportedly received more than \$2 million for the information he provided to Beijing. It is presumed that he passed similar information to Israel, which is known to be upgrading its cruise-missile and stealth capabilities, and that he did so through Israeli defense contractors and “businessmen” who then passed the information on to the Israel Aircraft Industries, the quasi-private government umbrella organization that acquires and develops aeronautical technologies. The Israeli government has denied involvement. The Chinese have not responded to State Department inquiries.



Confidential sources reveal that the United States is sending arms to the militias aligned with the Fatah faction in Palestine to enable a military confrontation with its rivals in Hamas.

Fatah, the party of President Mahmoud Abbas, is larger than its rivals but has been unable to match the grassroots and organizational abilities of Prime Minister Ismail Haniya’s Hamas. The covert U.S. assistance for Fatah has been orchestrated by Vice President Dick Cheney working through the Pentagon office of Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Steve Cambone. The arms and limited training in their use are supplied directly to Fatah cadres by way of the Jordanian military. Israel has approved the operation. The CIA, which continues to be viewed as “unreliable,” has been excluded from involvement under orders from the vice president.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a partner in Cannistraro Associates.

Arts & Letters

FILM

[*Casino Royale*]

Shaken But Not Stirring

By Steve Sailer

JAMES BOND is the most popular English fictional character since Sherlock Holmes, the hero of 23 movies raking in \$4 billion at the global box office. The essence of his screen appeal has been the paradox embodied in the medieval word “gentleman”: an individual of refined manners, educated in the arts of conversation, dress, and cuisine, whose profession is violence.

The English gentleman was the outcome of a project lasting a millennium and a half to mold the anarchic barbarian chieftains who conquered Dark Ages Europe into the upholders of civilization. Like the Japanese samurai, they were gentled by learning aristocratic culture without, of course, demeaning themselves so low as to have to get a job that didn't involve killing people.

Ian Fleming's 1953 novel *Casino Royale* introduced a rather grim Bond. The charming but deadly gentleman Bond who had such an impact on popular culture was largely invented in 1962 by the director of “Dr. No,” Terence Young. A public-school boy, Cambridge grad, twice-wounded WWII officer, wit, bon vivant, and ladies' man, Young had everything except directing talent. He ended his career helming the seldom-seen epics “Inchon” for the Reverend Moon and “Long Days” for Colonel Khaddafi.

What he did excel at, however, was teaching a young Scottish proletarian, a former milkman and coffin polisher named Sean Connery how to act like Terence Young.

Ever since, the producers of the series, the Broccoli family, have periodically announced that they are junking the jokes and reverting to Fleming's dark characterization of Bond. Even the flippant Roger Moore rebooted after the sci-fi hijinks of “Moonraker” in the lean “For Your Eyes Only” of 1981.

Now in “Casino Royale,” the thuggish-looking British actor Daniel Craig (the blond Mossad agent in Steven Spielberg's “Munich”) plays Bond as a humorless brute with a flat, classless Estuary English accent, and the critics (other than this one) are going wild.

Bond is supposed to be tall, dark, and handsome, but Craig is none of those, so there was much concern among fans. The filmmakers have dyed his hair light brown, however, so the audience's usual unconscious color prejudice—in movies, blond is for leading ladies, not action heroes—is muted.

While Craig is certainly intense, his dry-ice approach suits a film shorter than 144 minutes. “Casino Royale” is mediocre in execution and bloated in conception, wrapping the usual elephantine Bond movie mechanics around Fleming's minimal plot. (In the book, Bond doesn't even get to kill anybody.)

It might have been interesting to shoot “Casino Royale” as Fleming wrote it, as a short, modestly budgeted Marshall Plan-era period piece about a secret agent trying to prevent a French Communist union boss from striking it rich at the baccarat table so he can pay back the money he embezzled from his Soviet masters before they kill him. But

there would be no action, just a scene in which Bond gets tortured.

Instead, the screenwriters have added stunt-filled first and third acts that have only the most confusing relationship with the heart of the movie, in which Bond now outmaneuvers a terrorist banker at a high-stakes poker game in Montenegro. (Isn't the Texas Hold 'Em fad like so 2005?)

We first meet Bond in Madagascar—which has to be the least strategically located country on earth—where he's chasing a villain around a skyscraper under construction, endlessly leaping from I-beam to I-beam like a Super Mario Brother. If you're not a videogame addict, this can get old pretty quick.

After an undermotivated excursion to the Bahamas, Bond is at the Miami airport wrestling with some random bad guy who is trying to crash a fuel truck into the giant Airbus 380, but this whole sequence was done better in “Road Warrior” a quarter of a century ago.

Then it's off to Montenegro for the big card game. Irritatingly, the movie cheats on its location shoots, with the Czech Republic, where practically every European segment is filmed these days (because quaint Prague wasn't blown up in World War II) standing in for the newly independent beach country of Montenegro. And familiar, black-populated Bahamas weakly substitutes for exotic, Malaysian-colonized Madagascar.

One theme the film authentically preserves from the novel is its most distasteful—Fleming's S&M obsession. Craig's character suffers as much pain as the hero of a Mel Gibson movie. It's the Passion of the Bond. ■

Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of violent action, a scene of torture, sexual content and nudity.

BOOKS

[*Showdown With Nuclear Iran*, Michael D. Evans and Jerome R. Corsi, *Nelson Current*, 288 pages]

His God Must Be Crazy

By Gary Brecher

IF YOU COULD WAIT half a lifetime before getting revenge, we nerds would die happy because every nerd dreams of vengeance on the guys who beat him up in ninth grade. Then you wake up and realize whoa, I'm a 30-something working man with cardiac issues. My window of opportunity is gone, revenge-wise.

That's the first problem with this new book arguing for an invasion of Iran and with the entire let's-invade-Iran choir that's gaining ascendancy: it's 2006, not 1979. Everything's changed between Iran and us since they first attacked our embassy and deserved a good smack-down—and it hasn't changed in our favor. That probably explains why these authors spend so little time actually discussing an invasion of Iran—they know it's just not possible—and devote the bulk of their book to discussing Israel. In fact, it almost half reads like some kind of travel diary by one its authors, Michael Evans, describing his tour of Israel during the August 2006 border war with Hezbollah.

Evans tries to confuse the issue by saying it was "Iranian militants" who kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and took them into Lebanon. It's a pretty brazen lie, right there in the first paragraph of the book: "I'm in northern Israel, which is under a rocket attack by the Hezbollah terrorists of southern Lebanon on this bright summer day. A few days ago Iranian militants staged a raid into northern Israel, ambushing an Israeli Defense Force patrol, killing three sol-

diers, and abducting two as hostages for ransom."

Notice how in the first sentence he says "Hezbollah terrorists" are rocketing Israel, but in the next one he says "Iranian militants" kidnapped the IDF soldiers. I've searched all over the Internet, and I can't find anybody who claims that Iranians took those soldiers. Everybody in the world except Michael Evans says Hezbollah did it. And Hezbollah is not Iranian. It's pro-Iran, but that doesn't mean it's Iranian any more than the Iraqi Kurds are Americans just because they (sort of) support us.

Hezbollah's membership consists of Shi'ite Arabs from South Lebanon and Beirut, people who were born a few miles from the Mediterranean—a thousand miles west of Iran—and can't speak a word of Farsi. You would think a so-called "Middle East expert" like Evans would know the difference.

I suspect he does, actually. He's just trying to persuade his Bible-oriented readers that Iran is threatening the Holy Land. So he plays this shell game with the suckers: one minute it's Iranians capturing Israelis, next minute it's Hezbollah. Eventually he compromises by calling Hezbollah "a proxy of the Iranian government."

That's another lie, of course. Even if you don't know recent Middle Eastern history, you should be able to see through this "proxy" nonsense. If there's anything that recent military history shows clearly, it's that nobody, not even a superpower, can create a proxy army that will really fight—and Hezbollah proved pretty clearly that they can fight.

America and the USSR tried creating proxy armies all through the Cold War years. The only time it worked was when the locals had their own reasons to want to fight. In those cases, it's just a matter of sliding the cartons off the C-130's and cracking 'em open. Local war-lust will do the rest.

But when the locals are only fighting because some foreign power pays them, they're worthless. I hate to bring up painful memories, but anybody remem-

ber our old pal ARVN—the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam, aka South Vietnam? We poured so much blood and money into the South Vietnamese Army that it still hurts to think about it. At its peak, ARVN had 544,000 soldiers, one of the biggest and definitely one of the best-funded armies in the world. But without U.S. combat troops to provide some spine and USAF sorties to run their offense, ARVN collapsed as fast as Enron—and for pretty much the same reasons.

The Soviets tried the same technique in Africa and Afghanistan, with the same results. It's hard to believe now, but back in the 1970s people thought the USSR was going to take over Africa because those Soviets were funding so many proxy wars. All those African safaris got the Russians were tropical diseases and a huge cash drain. Most of the money went right into the pockets of the commanding officers of these proxy armies, and the armies either never existed in the first place or melted away the first time they met real troops.

That's exactly what happened to our worst-ever proxies, the Contras. They were supposed to be our Latin American version of the Colorado kids in Red Dawn—freedom-loving rebels who would overthrow the Sandinista commies. Instead they spent your tax dollars on fast boats and clothes—they were the only insurgents in history who dressed like extras on "Miami Vice." And as for how they behaved, it was more like Tony Montana, who would happily talk about how "I keel a Commyunis' fo' fun!" but then lose interest after the coke money started flowing.

So let's drop the nonsense that Hezbollah is just a stand-in for Iran. You can tell stand-ins by the way they fight, or rather don't fight. And Hezbollah has proved again and again that it's a serious army. It was Hezbollah that drove the IDF out of Lebanon in 2000. It was Hezbollah that launched the first suicide-bomb attacks on the IDF, long before any Palestinian even dreamed of doing anything that extreme. And in the 2006 border-war Evans is writing about,

Hezbollah defeated much better equipped IDF units. Even Israeli soldiers returning from the front admitted their admiration for the Hezzies who were willing to rush into IDF automatic fire in hopes of capturing another Israeli soldier. That's not how proxies fight.

It wasn't Iran that made the Shi'ites of southern Lebanon so tough. It was Israel. Before Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, the Shi'ites of southern Lebanon were the quietest, most peaceable tribe in the whole crazy country. There's no faster way to turn submissive peasant-types into kamikazes than by grabbing their land, and that's what Israel did, declaring a "security zone" in southern Lebanon. It was Israeli occupation that turned those Shi'ite peasants into the best soldiers in the Middle East, not Iranian cash. Cash just makes Contras; occupations make fighters.

If you want an ultra-painful example of that, just compare the Iraqi army before we occupied Iraq—a bunch of cowards who were surrendering to news crews—to the hardened insurgents we have to deal with now. That's what the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon did. In 1982, the Shia were still mostly humble farmers trying to scratch a living out of the dry hills of southern Lebanon. Then the IDF swooped in, killed a bunch of people, seized their land, and installed their own proxy army, a strange group called the South Lebanon Army (SLA) whose members were recruited from diehard Lebanese Christian clans, to keep the Shi'ites down. It went about the way you'd expect: the locals turned nasty, the proxy army dissolved, and Israel ended up abandoning its "security zone" in 2000.

In fact, I've been wondering where the soldiers of that proxy army, the SLA, went after Israel pulled out. Obviously they couldn't stay in southern Lebanon, so they were evacuated to Israel. But some of my sources there tell me that no SLA men have been seen in Israel for the last few years. Anybody know where they went?

Evans keeps trying to drag Iran over

to Israel any way he can. His whole argument is based on two equations:

1. Hezbollah = Iran
2. Israel = America

So according to Evans, when Hezbollah guerrillas attack an Israeli patrol, what's actually happening is Iran is attacking America—which is insane. I've already discussed the dishonest ways he tries to prove that Hezbollah equals Iran, but the ways he tries to prove that Israel equals America are even weirder. Here's a classic example: he talks about how the Iranians are planning an assault on "... the two DCs: Jerusalem DC (David's Capital) and Washington DC."

EVANS DOESN'T NEED ANY **REAL MIDDLE EASTERN HISTORY** BECAUSE HE'S CONVINCED THAT **MODERN ISRAEL IS IDENTICAL TO ANCIENT ISRAEL**, THE HOLY LAND OF THE BIBLE.

"Jerusalem DC," huh? That's so lame it would have made my old youth minister blush, and we're talking about a guy who literally played "Kumbaya" with a straight face.

It's time to hire a deprogrammer to take these neocons to a soundproof motel room and slap some sense into them before they get us all killed. Israel is not America. Israel is a small state established by force less than 60 years ago on land already occupied by a group of mixed Christian/Muslim Arabs who called themselves Palestinians, docile farmers who didn't like to fight. What turned them into Hamas was Israeli occupation.

These people were treated rough. Just consider the career of the man to whom Evans chose to dedicate this book: Menachem Begin. Evans praises Begin as a "brilliant man" whose "friendship" was a "privilege." Well, this "brilliant man" masterminded the terrorist bombing of the King David Hotel, killing 91 people including 17 Jews. This "brilliant man" ran the Irgun, a terrorist outfit responsible for killing at least 100 Arab civilians at Deir Yassein. This "brilliant man" ordered the 1982 invasion of Lebanon that resulted in the rise of

Hezbollah, and when the drive to Beirut ended with the massacre of about a thousand Palestinian refugees by Lebanese militias allied to Israel, Begin's only comment was "goyim kill goyim and Jews get the blame!" Begin was an interesting guy, to put it mildly, but he was no saint and Israel isn't God's proxy army in the Middle East.

But Evans thinks it is. He really believes that Israel is God's team, and anybody in their way is God's enemy. At the moment, the Israelis are worked up about Iran—Evans quotes Bibi Netanyahu trying to talk America into attacking Iran—and gullible Christians like Evans are ready to jump into a nasty

old gang-fight just because it happens to be fought on the territory of the Good Book. That's why Evans spends so much time touring "the peaceful Galilee of the Scriptures"—as if Galilee has ever been peaceful or ever will be.

Evans, a powerful evangelical leader, tries to soft-pedal his religious side in this book, but he's not so bashful in his other bestseller, *American Prophecies*, where it turns out everything in the Bible is about America, which is obvious by the fact that America isn't mentioned once. The last chapter of *American Prophecies* is titled, "Lunatics, Liberals, and Liars"—three words that start with "L" and prove that anybody who argues with Dick Cheney is going against God.

That's why there's so little argument or information in this book. Evans doesn't need to learn, let alone teach, any real Middle Eastern history because he's convinced that modern Israel is identical to ancient Israel, the Holy Land of the Bible. The less you know about the region, the easier it is to believe that.

The more you learn about the actual history of the Middle East, the harder it gets. Take for example Evans's favorite place, "the peaceful Galilee of the Scriptures." He's all broken up over the fact

that “peaceful Galilee” is getting Hezbollah rockets lobbed into it on a daily basis as he writes. If he only knew a little about Galilee, he wouldn’t be so worried. Galilee can take it, dude. Galilee has been a battleground for thousands of years; the Israelis and Hezbollah are just doing what comes naturally in Galilee, just like the Byzantines, Druze, Fatimids, Crusaders, and Ottomans did before them.

A little more than 800 years ago, Galilee was the site of a battle between the armies of Christ and Allah, a truly apocalyptic showdown won by the Muslims under Saladin, who jumped a Crusader army marching to the relief of Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee and wiped out the Christians, ending the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands of Christian believers had died to win that kingdom, and in one day’s battle, Saladin destroyed it. Where do all those soldiers of Christ fit into Evans’s nonsense? If you ask me, the medieval Europeans who left their homes and marched to Jerusalem to regain the Holy Land for Christendom were a way more noble, courageous bunch than Evans and his readers sitting in their recliners pretending that Likud politicians like Netanyahu and Sharon are God’s anointed, preparing the way for Christ’s Kingdom.

If Evans had been around back then, no doubt he’d have read the battle of Hattin as a sign. If he’d been born any time between then and now, he’d have had other battles, much bigger and more important than the skirmishes between the IDF and Hezbollah, to interpret as proof that the end times were upon us. The only reason he takes current events as his signal is that he’s too ignorant to know any others.

I guess this is a matter of faith, and you’re never, ever supposed to question somebody’s faith. So I’ll just say that Evans’s faith is a wonderful thing, etc.—but if guys like Begin and Netanyahu are God’s anointed, then somebody in Heaven’s Human Resources Division needs to be fired.

Of course you need faith sometimes.

Especially if you’re planning to invade Iran when your army is already stuck in a disastrous counter-insurgency war in Iraq while you’re trying to hold Afghanistan together with string and rubber bands. If there was ever a case for faith-based solutions, this is it—because faith is all that’s left when every brain cell you’ve got is saying, “Are you crazy? Invade Iran? Now? Have you been sniffing gasoline again?”

No matter how hard you look for a realistic discussion of what an invasion would cost, you won’t find it in this book. That’s where Evans’s faith comes in. By his logic, we couldn’t possibly fail because God wants us to do it. Now I don’t want to question his faith, because in America, you can never, ever say that a man of God is a reckless idiot who’s trying to destroy our country. But would it be too much, Pastor Evans, sir, Your Holiness, to ask for some discussion of real-world problems, like how we’re going to invade a country three times bigger than Iraq while keeping the lid on the mess there? Or how we’ll cope with Iran’s mountainous terrain, history of anti-American nationalism, and Shi’ite martyr culture?

HE’S MUCH **MORE AT HOME WITH NONSENSICAL WORD GAMES** LIKE “JERUSALEM DC” THAN TRYING TO CONCENTRATE ON MATTERS LIKE **TROOP NUMBERS**.

Actually, Evans does mention these problems. Yup, he gives each of them about a paragraph, then moves on. It’s eerie. They obviously don’t register with him. He’s much more at home coming up with nonsensical word games like “Jerusalem DC” than trying to concentrate on earthly matters like geography, logistics, troop numbers, and history.

When Evans finally gets down to military details, in the last third of the book, he sounds weirdly distracted, as if he’s taking dictation rather than actually thinking about the problems. He passes over difficulties that would have made Patton faint as if they’re just whining from fussy parents about the upcoming church picnic. Here, for instance, is his

casual guess at how the actual campaign would go: “...the Iranian military forces would most likely be no more effective than Saddam Hussein’s military had been in stopping the United States’ military invasion. A war focused on Tehran would probably last no longer than a few weeks, following the same hard-charge strategy as the drive on Baghdad.”

Just read that over a couple of times. Then help me look up how to get a person involuntarily committed because this guy is patently clinically insane. Here’re a few scary key facts: Iran has almost 70 million people, compared to 26 million in Iraq. We can’t hope to exploit ethnic divisions because more than half are ethnic Persians; another 24 percent are Azeris, very close to the Persians and highly unlikely to side with an invader against them. A disproportionate number of the Iranian population is of fighting age because the birthrate soared back in the early days of the revolution then dropped quickly. That means Iran has millions of young men eager to die repelling infidel American invaders, with relatively few babies to take care of. It’s a recruiter’s dream. And Iranians have always had the reputation

for being fierce soldiers, especially when defending the homeland. It was the Iranians who attacked in “martyr battalions” during the Iran-Iraq War, while the Iraqis cowered in their berms.

For all these reasons, no sane military writer would just casually say that Iran “will be no more effective than Saddam Hussein’s military” in opposing a U.S. invasion. But I guess that kind of cheap equation, Iran = Iraq, fits Evans’s childish way of thinking. After all, he’s already decided that Israel = America and Hezbollah = Iran. Why shouldn’t he assume that all Muslim countries beginning with “Ira-” are pretty much the same?

Evans barely even bothers to acknowledge that we’ve run into a few problems

in Iraq. It doesn't seem to occur to him that these same problems might crop up once we're patrolling the streets of Tehran—which, as you'll recall, we'll reach in “a few weeks.” He devotes a whole half-sentence to the issue of our overextended military and then manages to turn it into a positive for us by pointing out that our troops will have a much shorter trip! “Skeptics within the United States as well as worldwide will argue that an invasion of Iran will overstretch the US military and prove too costly to undertake. Yet, with US military force levels currently being reduced in Iraq, redeployment to Iran is more achievable now, possibly even less costly than it would be should forces deployed from Iraq be fully repositioned at home.”

Sure, that's the ticket! We'll just tell those National Guard units who have already stayed in the Baghdad shooting gallery far past their designated time that we're repositioning them a little further to the northeast, specifically to Tehran. Just think of the savings when we tell them they don't even get to go home in between. Boy will they be happy!

That passage is typical of the odd callousness toward American soldiers Evans shows throughout the book. He's so convinced that God is on his and Menachem Begin's side that he never considers what it would cost America to launch this suicidal attack on Iran while trying to manage Iraq and Afghanistan. He just doesn't care about any country on earth except Israel. His only worry is that “an attack on Iran might further destabilize the Middle East, such that Israel's ultimate survival is even more at risk...”

Wait, what? “Israel's ultimate survival”? Dude, what about America? Ever worry what a failed invasion of Iran would do to America's “ultimate survival”? Clearly not. America, which he's eager to send into the meat grinder, is not even on Evans's agenda. ■

Gary Brecher writes the War Nerd column for the eXile, a Moscow-based alternative newspaper.

[*Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*, David Kuo, Free Press, 283 pages]

David Out of the Lions' Den

by Doug Bandow

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT has long targeted those many Christians have seen as the devil's political helpers—Bill Clinton, Ted Kennedy, People for the American Way, the American Civil Liberties Union. Of late, David Kuo has joined that list.

A Christian political activist who worked for the National Right to Life Committee, Bill Bennett's Empower America, the CIA, a Christian charity, and the Bush administration's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Kuo is an unusual addition to the list. But Kuo has criticized administration officials and evangelical politicians, earning him the enmity of both.

Tempting Faith is one of those rare Washington books that is worth reading—clearly written, disarmingly honest, thoughtfully introspective, and unusually substantive. We are enriched as we learn about Kuo the person as well as his involvement in Christian politics.

Kuo was a high-school convert to Christianity who got excited about political activism in college. He found it easier to advocate theology than to apply it. He notes with unusual candor, “I had never thought much about abortion until my girlfriend had one.” It's not a line that most religious conservatives would use. Explained Kuo, “Jesus was no match for my hormones.”

Despite some liberal impulses—Kuo interned for Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) for instance—his religious enthusiasm soon led him into the conservative political hive. Kuo writes, “The biggest surprise for me in my new church was learning that our Christian faith presupposed a common political agenda.” Opposition to abortion and gay rights

were bedrocks. “My political education didn't stop there. I learned that Christians were absolutely pro-capitalism and that meant taxes were bad and always needed to be cut,” he notes.

Today a more mature and sober Kuo writes, “Ironically, opposing sin became a sort of substitute for pursuing God. Opposing political parties is very easy when compared to some of Jesus' daunting challenges.” As he explains, “Jesus required my life. Politics required only my attention. And I really, really loved politics.”

Yet Kuo discovered that love threatened to subvert his commitment to the poor—which originally brought him into politics. He didn't like what he saw: “As C.S. Lewis warned in *Screwtape*, my faith had become a means to a political end, and not an end unto itself. When that happened, Lewis warned, the enemy almost has his man. I needed that to end before I lost my soul.”

Kuo writes about how, while working for Bill Bennett and Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.), he learned about the “use of code language,” mostly Biblical imagery, which allowed politicians to convince religious leaders that they all were soul brothers. He writes, “this *should* have been driving me nuts. It should have offended me far more than anything President Clinton or the Democrats were doing. We were bastardizing God's words for our own political agenda and feeling good about it. The truth is I didn't think anything of it. I wouldn't for years.”

Many people have grown frustrated with politics; Kuo obviously was touched at a deeper level. After a time, he worried that he “had spoken mistruths in hate” about the Clintons. He had used cheap applause lines, but “that had to stop. If I ever could, I knew I ought to apologize for doing it.” This is another observation that few conservatives, and especially few Christian conservatives, would make, let alone act on.

In one of the moments that suggests God must exist—and that gives Kuo's book an unusual authenticity—he tells of attending a dinner before the National

Prayer Breakfast. Kuo describes how a woman surrounded by Secret Service agents approached: "*oh crap it is the Antichrist. It is Hillary Clinton.* I looked around to make sure I hadn't actually voiced those words. *You wanted a chance to apologize to the Clintons for what you said. Oh double s--t!*"

She "worked" the room, as Washingtonians put it, and Kuo found himself shaking her hand. He apologized for having attacked her personally. But then he worried about being found out. Clinton was moved and later spoke of Kuo's action in the context of forgiveness. When told of it, writes Kuo, "My life flashed before my eyes. My career was ruined. Hillary Clinton had just talked about me apologizing to her ... in public? I was ruined. I knew that I had said I didn't want to do politics anymore, but ... Oh no." She didn't mention his name, so his career survived.

Even after perceiving the error of his ways, Kuo found that temptation was never far away. He left Ashcroft's office to found a charity. Former Vice President Dan Quayle offered to help raise funds—if he could invite the local press to cover his efforts. Writes Kuo:

'Yes, absolutely, great,' I said. Yet my heart was sinking. The little internal voice that had convinced me of my need to apologize to the Clintons was screaming for me to tell Dan Quayle no. His heart may have been perfectly pure. His entire goal may have been just to raise money for these groups. God may well have given him that vision. But that wasn't my vision. Still, I wasn't having a ton of luck raising the millions required to fund my dream. I said yes because I knew he could raise a lot more money than I could on my own, and he could give me more financial security in my own life. So I supposed that I was not part of Dan Quayle's presidential aspirations for 2000.

Neither Kuo's charity nor Quayle's political ambitions gained much from the bargain.

Kuo was invited to meet Texas Gov. George W. Bush and was taken by the latter's commitment to meeting social needs. (Kuo's description of the meeting is cheerfully self-deprecating, one of many endearing moments that make the book both enjoyable and credible.) Kuo ended up writing speeches for candidate Bush before Kuo's friend Mike Gerson was brought on board.

After a dot-com interlude, Kuo joined the White House faith-based office. The result is a distressing story of religious identification and political opportunism, a sustained effort by the administration to take advantage of values voters.

It is this account that has so angered those with a stake in the GOP-Christian alliance. Yet Kuo's critics have neither disputed his facts nor rebutted his arguments. His account has a consistently authentic ring.

EXPLAINS KUO, "GEORGE W. BUSH'S RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION WAS THE MOST CAREFULLY CONTROLLED ASPECT OF HIS PUBLIC IMAGE."

Tempting Faith is no tell-all effort at payback. There is no anger, only disappointment. There is no name calling, only gentle chiding. Kuo never shrinks from acknowledging his own responsibility; he never fails to acknowledge the kindness of his colleagues (especially after he was struck by a brain tumor). He consistently voices his respect for the president. Kuo appears to be the genuine article: a committed Christian dedicated to doing good who found that politicians around him were determined—surprise, surprise!—to advance their own interests.

Alas, how could it be any other way? There is much in Kuo's account of his time in the White House that should repel any devout Christian. Three themes dominate Kuo's account.

First, the president is a committed believer, but he also is a politician, ever ready to use his faith for political advantage. Explains Kuo, "George W. Bush's religious orientation was the most carefully controlled aspect of his public

image. For him to win the Republican nomination, religious conservatives would have to be convinced that his religious faith was genuine and evangelical. But to win the general election, Bush needed to be seen as mainstream, and not 'too' religious." Thus there was abundant use of code words and symbols, as well as "a lot of spiritual sharing," writes Kuo. Many evangelicals came to trust Bush personally, becoming one of his most solid voting blocs.

Second, whatever the president's theoretical commitment to his faith-based initiative, the issue competed with many other administration objectives. Despite the talk of new funding for faith-based groups, Bush officials mostly proposed reprogramming existing funds or counting as "new" old initiatives where impediments to access by religious groups supposedly were lowered.

Nor could the president claim ignorance. Before addressing one meeting of pastors, Bush pulled Kuo aside and asked about funding. Kuo told him the truth—that "there was *technically* about \$8 billion in existing programs that were now eligible for faith-based groups. But, I assured him, faith-based groups had been getting money from those programs for years." Nevertheless, Bush announced that the administration had set aside \$8 billion in new funds. It was all symbolism. Observes Kuo:

As we walked I vaguely recalled one of Jesus' parables about only being able to reap what you have sown. We had sown the symbolic seeds of compassion with our constituents. They had accepted them gratefully. We had sown them with the president, too, and he was happy with them.

Nothing changed after Kuo left the White House in late 2003. After hearing more misleading administration rhetoric

ric months later, Kuo says, "I was surprised by the brazen deception and I was crushed by it, too."

Third, the faith-based initiative was routinely and shamelessly used to win votes. Kuo astutely observes, "In many areas—particularly domestic policy—this White House didn't exist to advance a certain philosophical agenda. It existed to advance a positive public perception of the president and itself."

From start to finish the program was political. Kuo and his boss regularly attended the White House "message meeting," which set the president's PR agenda. Yet the White House made little effort to pass its own proposal while the GOP leadership sought to milk the

rocate. To the contrary, he writes, "For most of the rest of the White House staff, evangelical leaders were people to be tolerated, not people who were truly welcomed. No group was more eye-rolling about Christians than the political affairs shop." This claim has been sharply criticized, but it almost certainly is true. Those most committed to politics often are the most cynical. Conservative and especially Republican activists are no different: they want votes, not advice, from the Christian Right.

Kuo was long blind but eventually saw: "I realized I had passed through to the other side. I wasn't just a Christian trying to serve God in politics. Now I was a Christian in politics looking for

and "take every ounce of energy we currently expend on politics and divert it to other things."

Such a step would shock both Left and Right, but this argument is perhaps the least persuasive part of *Tempting Faith*. Alas, a temporary change solves nothing. Instead of absenting themselves from politics for a time, Christians need to rethink what politics is about. Government is not a redemptive institution, and it is not capable of remaking society. Nor is it a proper vehicle for promoting Christian theology. The state has important but limited roles, and there's no uniquely Christian agenda for what government does.

Thus Christians should remain active in politics, but not "Christian" politics. They should join with their neighbors in an attempt to make a better world but not act as if there is a particular Christian legislative agenda—even Kuo's preferred program of delivering more federal bucks to religious groups to help meet social needs.

Christians should devote their religious passions to evangelize, aid the poor, support fragile families, discourage abortion, and more. Politics is not unimportant, and some Christians will find themselves called into government. But the Gospel is a message of the individual's relationship with God and with his neighbors, not of how he should use the state to advance his religious beliefs.

Most books that come out of Washington are dedicated to burnishing the author's image or smashing the author's enemies, or both. *Tempting Politics* is neither. It is a refreshingly honest account of how politics can seduce the best intentioned and the most naïve.

Christian political activists who dismiss Kuo rather than confront his arguments risk following Esau in selling their spiritual birthright for a bowl of porridge. ■

Doug Bandow is the author of several books, including Beyond Good Intentions: A Biblical View of Politics (Crossway) and The Politics of Envy: Statism as Theology (Transaction).

"I REALIZED I HAD **PASSED THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE**. I WASN'T JUST A CHRISTIAN TRYING TO **SERVE GOD IN POLITICS**. NOW I WAS A CHRISTIAN IN POLITICS **LOOKING FOR WAYS TO RECRUIT OTHER CHRISTIANS**."

legislative fight for evangelical votes. The Office of Public Liaison even demanded that politically influential evangelicals be invited to the prayer services held at the National Cathedral after 9/11.

Among the most blatant political moves was the plan developed by Kuo and his boss to organize roundtable events in states with endangered Republican senators before the 2002 election. They suggested the plan to Ken Mehlman, then head of the White House Office of Political Affairs (later chairman of the Republican National Committee), who liked it but insisted that the legislators "invite" the faith-based personnel to host a meeting. Kuo spoke on behalf of Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.), even though "he had been absolutely silent on compassion issues until that point in his Senate career." There were more politically inspired events—conferences to help faith-based groups apply for federal grants—before the 2004 election.

Although Kuo faithfully served the politicians, the politicians did not recip-

ways to recruit other Christians into politics so that we would have their votes." What to do with this revelation? "Now I had to ask if I was a corrupting force in other people's faith." It was hard for him not to answer yes. After all, as he admits with reluctance, Christian conservatives in the GOP "were the flip side of the NAACP and the Democratic Party," political captives with little real influence.

Kuo fell for Washington's charms. But he's not alone. Many of us also have followed the siren's song. Notes Kuo, "the White House was also one of the most seductive places imaginable. Not just because of the perks, which are nice, but because of the raw power of the place hidden in a true desire to save the world. It is the ring of power from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*."

Kuo argues, "it is time to take stock both politically and spiritually. Has our political focus produced the desired results?" It's hard to say yes, even though "we've had almost everything we wanted politically." In response, Kuo advocates a temporary fast—just vote,

Stranger Than Fiction



Last year was a bad one for Mohammad Bijeh, an Iranian chap who killed a couple of innocent people and got caught. Iran, as the neocons tell

us, presents a clear and present danger—to Bijeh, that is. In front of a baying crowd, he was flogged at the stake, stabbed in the back by the brother of one of his victims, and stoned by the chanting mob. Then he was hoisted up on a crane by a noose the mother of another victim placed around his neck. It took more than five minutes for him to choke to death while he was taunted and spat upon. His corpse was left dangling for another 20 minutes.

Switch to the Land of the Free and count your lucky stars—if you like to kill people, that is. Over here you can butcher your ex-wife and a male friend walking beside her, make an unsuccessful getaway, have traces of her blood found on the socks in your bedroom, but thanks to star-stuck cops, incompetent prosecutors, a buffoon for a judge, and a despicable defense lawyer, almost become a TV star and a literary lion.

I am of course referring to O.J. Simpson, who continues to draw his \$400,000 annual pension from the NFL and whose multi-million dollar Florida home is safe from any court judgment. But he should not start counting that \$3.5 million he was offered for his new book, *If I Did It*, which promised to reveal how he might have killed Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman. The book is being shredded, and his two-part interview scheduled to air on Fox, has been pulled from the sweeps' week line-up.

After a major public outcry and appeals from the victims' families, News Corp Chairman Rupert Murdoch delivered the mea culpa himself. Murdoch

has been accused of many things but never of being dumb. He got a whiff of the popular resentment all the way out in Australia, and although he was in the know from the start, he saw the train wreck coming. Good for the dirty digger, as Rupert is known in Blighty.

O.J. is out, but corporate greed is here to stay. So although my spies tell me that promoting the wrongdoings of criminals is dangerous business, here are a few ideas for Murdoch & Co. to make up for the loss of revenue from this fiasco.

I hear that Paul Wolfowitz is trying his hand at science fiction. In his novel, he describes an imaginary America in

humility, patient diplomacy, and a determination to resolve international disputes by peaceful means. When an antagonist tells the heroine that she believes the death of 500,000 Iraqi children was a price worth paying, our girl slaps her rather hard. It is a beautiful ending that will bring readers to tears.

But wait. There is always John Podhoretz, who can also scribble fiction. Podhoretz, as we all know, rose through the ranks of the U.S. Marines and after serving his country became a judicious political analyst. In his novel, the hero is nothing like the author. He is a fat blowhard, inordinately ambitious, who enjoys a lucrative career in journalism calling for permanent war. This book, I predict, will not be serialized by *The Weekly Standard* because of conflict of interest.

HE DESCRIBES AN IMAGINARY AMERICA IN WHICH AN UNSCRUPULOUS BUNCH OF OPPORTUNISTS PIGGYBACKS THEIR WAY TO POWER VIA A CLUELESS PRESIDENT.

which an unscrupulous bunch of opportunists piggybacks their way to power via a clueless president. Then by whipping up hysteria about nuclear holocausts and by cooking intelligence data, they con the nation into waging war against a small country that poses no threat to the United States, an invasion that exclusively serves the interests of a foreign government for which they had surreptitiously worked over a number of years. America builds up a mountain of debt and becomes hated throughout the world.

Madeleine Albright, too, can write fiction, and in her novel she creates a distinguished, intelligent, self-effacing heroine very much like herself who pursues a public life characterized by

Never mind. There is always Hillary Clinton. In her tale, ghosted by David Frum, the heroine works tirelessly in a small-town law firm committed to helping people who are neither powerful nor glamorous. She eventually marries a wonderful man who runs for president and wins the election in a landslide, his motto being "enough is enough." But during his first term, he drops dead after spending a week outdoors helping the poor during a tsunami. The veep asks her to become his veep, and the author goes on to become the next president of the United States.

You might think it's all a bit farfetched but not after the O.J. Simpson saga. Truth, after all, has always been stranger than fiction. ■

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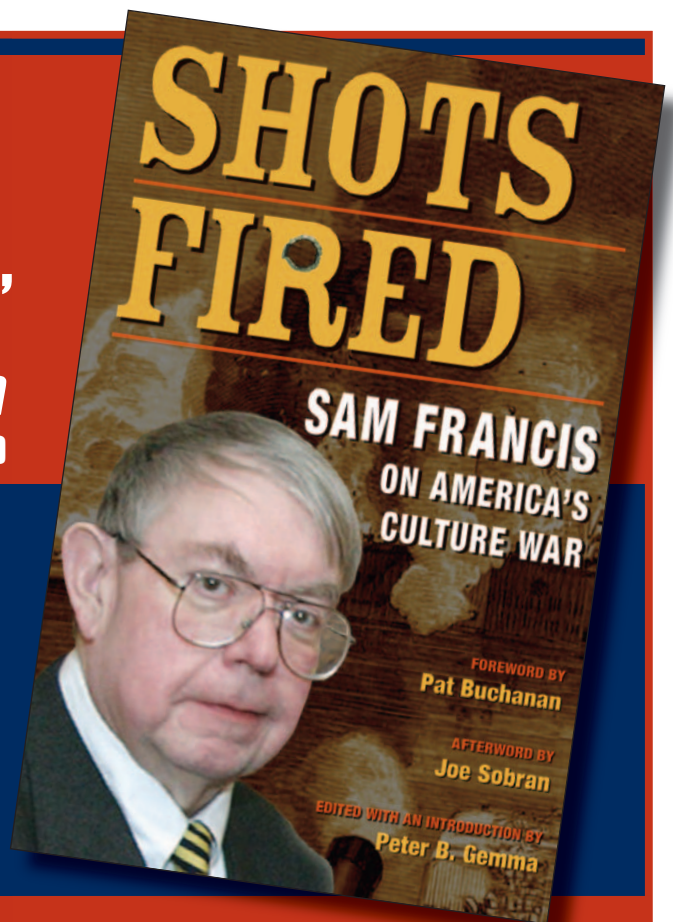
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